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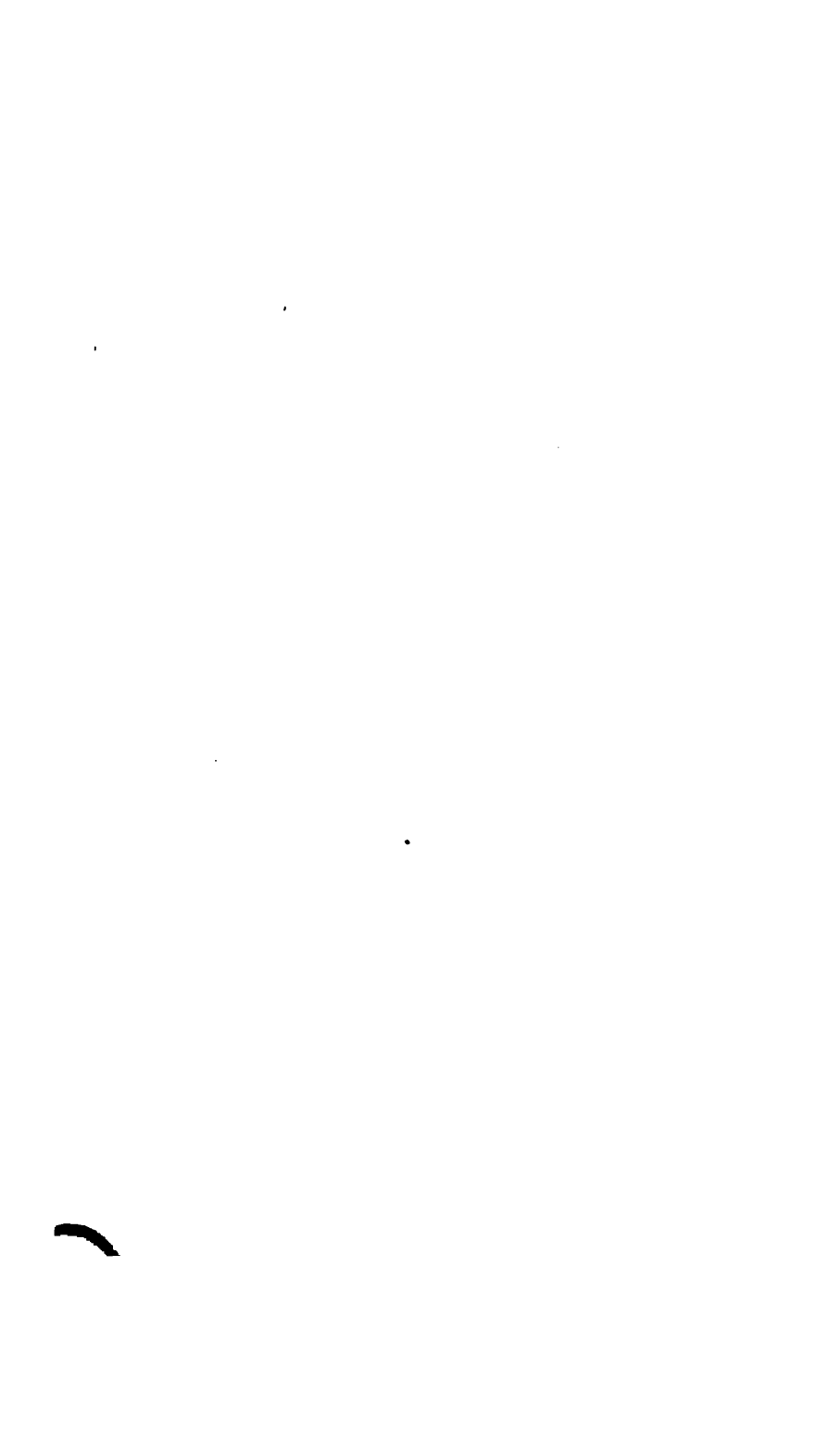


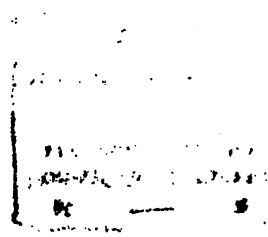




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From a photograph by F. F. WHITNEY JACKSON.

"AN UNWILLING AND PROTESTING VICTIM IN THE ARMS OF HIS
GUARDIAN."

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L.W.

SHEBA

by ANNA CHAPIN RAY

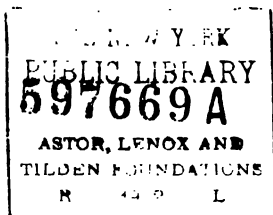
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"The whole story of the children of the poor, the story of the bad their lives struggle vainly to conquer, and the story of the good that crops out in spite of it."

JACOB A. RIIS.

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SHEBA.

I.

THE WRATH OF THE MINOR PROPHETS.

THE Minor Prophets sat in an irate row on the edge of the sandbin in the playground of School Number Seven. For the hour, the sandbin was otherwise deserted. The babies who usually swarmed there and wielded industrious little shovels had gone inside the kindergarten room. Their shrill voices, strident as locusts, came piping out across the hot, sunshiny yard, —

“ ‘ Love-lee moon, silver moon,
Sail-ing so high ! ’ ”

The other children were gathered around the swings or under the awnings, all but the trio

of Minor Prophets who had withdrawn themselves from the sports in order to hold council of war. Hosie Wikrowski was spokesman, partly by virtue of the dignity he gained from spectacles and a mortarboard cap, partly because, during the past summer, he had been the only boy in the yard who had made a practice of being even moderately clean.

"'Tain't hisself dat I minds," he said judicially; "it 's his clo'es, an' his swaggerin' in 'em so. He ain't de only kid in de yard wot wears shoes."

Dannie Mastenbrend scratched his bare, brown ankle reflectively.

"Nah," he assented; "an' it ain't so smart ter wear shoes as some fellers seems ter t'ink. It's well enough if yer feet 's soft, er if yer mudder makes yer; but 'tain't de way I'd wan' ter do, myself." As he spoke, he glanced at Hosie's stubby shoes, then spread out his own sturdy toes and waggled them serenely.

Hosie pounced forward with uplifted hand; but Amos Budesheim interposed. The Prophets were bent upon fighting for a principle,

and it would ruin their cause to have petty dissensions creeping into their midst.

"Stop yer scrappin'," he ordered, with all the dignity of his eight summers. "We ain't talkin' about shoes er no shoes; we 're talkin' about Sollie Antz. Wot's we goin' ter do wid him; dat's de question."

"Oh, dat Sol Antz, he makes me tired!" Dannie burst out explosively. "Le's chase him out 'n de yard."

"Can'."

"W'y not?"

"He's Toni Valovick's cousin, an' Toni 'd lick us."

"Let him!" Amos said belligerently.

Hosie drew back. From experience he had learned the might of Toni's arm and the instability of Toni's temper. For the past two seasons, Toni had been the cock of the playground. Sol was Toni's cousin. If the Minor Prophets drove Sol out of the playground, Hosie's logical mind assured him that the Minor Prophets would probably depart upon Sol's heels.

"Dat would n' do no good," he objected. "He 'd be chasin' roun' Rose Street ter show hisself off. Wot we wants, is ter take de stuffin' out 'n him. He 'd ought ter be shut up in a dime museum, not let walk roun' loose."

"How 'll we do it?" Dannie asked.

"D' know. Wot d' yer t'ink, Amos?"

Amos pondered.

"It 's got ter be somethin' ter make him feel small," he said; "somethin' ter show him dat he ain't so smart 's he t'inks he is. W'y, he rung de bell, dis noon, an' he hain't been here a week yit."

"I seen Miss Derin' an' Miss Loomis larfin' at him behin' deir han's, w'en he come inside de yard, dis aft'noon," Dannie asserted; "an' Miss Sally, she says, 'How fine yer are, Sollie!'"

"Dere ain't no sort er sense in it," Hosie observed. "A feller need n' go roun', like de Luyckx kiddie, wid nothin' on but a jumper an' top boots; but dat's no reason he should be togged out like a girl at a party. 'Tain't

Sol I objec's ter ; it's his clo'es, an' dem clo'es has got ter be got out 'n dis yard."

"How?" Dannie asked again.

"D' know. Anyhow, s' long's it's quick. Look at him now, will yer?"

The Minor Prophets raised their heads to stare at the small figure across the yard. Then they lowered their heads and their voices, and fell to plotting ruin for their lucklessly neat companion.

Meanwhile, their victim stood beside one of the swings, loftily contemplating its ragged occupants, while he wrangled for his own turn to come next. It was small wonder that the Prophets, as they looked, felt that his appearance was a rebuke to themselves. An only son, he was manifestly a mamma's darling. His dress was fantastic. Long white duck trousers were surmounted by a bright blue cloth coat with shiny black facings, and by a white shirt, a real tuck-in shirt, while his chubby little face stuck out above a stiff standing collar and tie, both of a most mannish cut. The shirt and the collar and the tie would have

been quite enough to condemn him in the sight of the Minor Prophets; but, most flagrant sin of all, he was clean, clean not according to the standards of Rose Street, but to those of the outer world. To be sure, his cleanliness was intermittent and sporadic; nevertheless, it was there. Under some circumstances, the Prophets could have forgiven the other details, never the cleanliness.

"Hi-i-i-i! Sol! Come here a minute!"

At the call, Sollie turned quickly. In his secret heart, he had mourned over the isolation of his grandeur. He had been in the yard for three days now, and, except for the girls and the tiny children, not a soul had spoken to him. Moreover, he had overheard some of the more drastic comments of the Minor Prophets, and, in the privacy of his own home, he had rebelled at the cleanness and the starch of his garments.

"G' long wid yer!" his mother had ordered him. "Yer looks like de son er a gen'leman, Sollie, an' yer mudder's proud er yer. Nobody'd t'ink yer wuz Sheba's brudder. W'y,

Sollie, yer looks jus' like de boys up on de avenoo. Ter see yer, dey'd say yer never lived in Rose Street. W'ere's yer pride, boy? G' long an' show yerself ter de udders, an' done wid it."

"Sol! Sollie Antz!"

The voice of Amos was imperative, and Sollie judged it best not to delay.

"Wot d'yer wan'?" he called back.

"Want you. Wot d'yer s'pose?"

With an attempted show of reluctance, Sollie trotted across the yard in the direction of the sandbin. The Minor Prophets hailed him with an air of joyous mystery.

"Come an' se' down," Hosie said, making room for him on the edge of the bin.

Sollie cast an apprehensive glance at the dusty board, and bethought himself of the maternal charges concerning his white duck trousers. He hesitated; but the Minor Prophets seemed to him the embodiment of social greatness, and he was wise in his generation. He sat himself down gingerly.

"Wot d'yer wan'?" he repeated.

"Sh-h-h-h!" Dannie whispered. "Dere's Miss Sally!" And ostentatiously he fell to making a sand fort, until the young teacher had passed on. Then he turned back to Sollie. "D' yer wan' some fun?" he demanded.

"'Course."

"An' won't yer tell?"

"Nah."

"Look it," Amos struck in; "we hain't got enough fur any more fellers; but we t'ought we'd let yer inter it. See?"

Sollie nodded, although the subject was still opaque to him.

"'Nough wot?" he inquired.

"'Nough plunks. We's goin' ter have a treat, candy an' wattermelons."

"W'en?"

"Now."

"W'ere?"

"Here in de sandbin."

"Dey 'll see yer, an' swipe 'em."

"Nah; dey won'. We'll scrouch down in de edge, behin' de fence. If anybody does come, we'll punch 'em."

Sollie's eyes glistened. He was only seven years old, and he felt that this was "seeing life" with a vengeance.

"How much yer got?" he inquired.

"I got five cents, an' Dannie t'ree, an' Hosie 's got sebben."

"Huh!" Sollie's tone was charged with a contempt which hurt the feelings of the Minor Prophets. They concealed the injury; but it helped to strengthen their resolution to "take it out'n" this young aristocrat. "Huh!" he repeated disdainfully, plunging his fist into his white duck pocket. "Is dat all yer got? See here!"

The Prophets blinked at the two shining silver pieces in Sollie's hand. Then they requisitioned them for the common fund.

"But de gate's locked," Amos remarked guilelessly. "How kin we git out?"

"Ask Miss Sally," Sol suggested, with a pertness born of his riches.

"Softie! An' blow de whole t'ing, so s't all de udder kids'll be hangin' roun'! Not much!"

"I'll tell yer." Hosie dropped his voice to a murmur. "Dere's two gates, yer know, only one er 'em ain't nebber opened. Dere ain't nobody in dat yard, anyhow, hardly ebber. Le's go in dere, an' crawl under de gate."

"De whole push on us?" Amos asked.

"Nah! One'll do. He kin take de money, an' bring back de stuff ter eat, an' pass it t'rough de bars, an' den crawl back ag'in."

"Who'll do it?"

There was a silence, while the Prophets appeared to be considering the situation. Then Dannie spoke.

"He'd ought ter be de smalles', ter git t'rough. Le's measure."

"Gee! I hope 't will be me!" Hosie muttered, as Dannie placed him and Amos back to back.

Amos was the shorter, and accordingly Hosie measured him beside Dannie who overtopped him by an inch or two. Then Sollie took his turn. The Prophets clapped their hands.

"Sollie's got it! Sollie's got it! I wisht I wuz in his shoes!" And Hosie capered



From a photograph by J. K. DEWELL.

THE MINOR PROPHETS.

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clumsily about, while Miss Sally, across the yard, wondered what especial blessing was to fall upon the taller boy, and rejoiced that at last Sollie had been received into full fellowship of the Prophets. She nodded approvingly and waved her hand.

"Yes, Hosie," she called blithely. "I did n't suppose he was such a great, big fellow. Coming, Henry!" And she vanished inside the kindergarten room.

"Miss Sally!" It was Hosie's voice at her elbow, and Hosie's face was clouded with the gravest anxiety. "Miss Sally!"

"Well, Hosie?"

"Dat blame fool, Sol Antz, 's been tryin' ter sneak out 'n de yard, an' he 's been an' cotched hisself."

"What do you mean?" Miss Sally had had experience in many an emergency; but now the pink color rushed into her cheeks and fled again, as she asked the question.

"Yes, tight under de gate. He can' wiggle none," Hosie announced solemnly. "He wuz tryin' ter git out, an' he t'ought yer would n'

let him go, so he started ter git under de gate in de udder yard, an' he jammed hisself in dere. Should n' wonder if yer had ter have de gate took down, ter git him out," he added reassuringly.

Meanwhile, Dannie and Amos had been busy in the yard, and, by the time Miss Sally reached the gate, she found a small mob of children surrounding the spot, and offering shrill advice to the captive. Whatever the catastrophe might be, at least it was not enfeebling its victim. Of so much she was convinced, for he was roaring lustily and, as she came nearer, she could see two duck-covered legs, white no longer, kicking madly in the air. Beside him stood Dannie and Amos.

"Don' cry no more, Sol," Dannie was saying sympathetically. "Here comes Miss Sally, an' she'll git yer out 'n dis. Maybe she'll have ter cut off somethin', one er yer legs, er somethin', but she'll git yer out 'n it in de end, see if she don'."

The kicks and the roars redoubled. Then

Miss Sally bent over him, and he heard her voice, kindly, pitiful, yet merry, —

“Lie still, Sol, and let Miss Sally see what she can do.”

There was a pause, of suspense on Sollie's part, of indecision on the part of Miss Sally. The iron gate came nearly to the ground. Sollie was fat and soft. Moreover, he was persevering and, in his determination to show himself a worthy companion to the Prophets, he had wriggled his way forward until his round little stomach was tightly wedged under the heavy iron bars. It would be no easy matter to extricate him ; and Miss Sally was at a loss how to proceed. Then she reflected that what went in must come out, and she remembered that little children are constructed of malleable material. Pushing aside Amos, who was cheerily predicting surgery and the undertaker, she dropped on her knees beside Sollie and fell to kneading him, as she might have kneaded freshly-risen dough.

“Sollie,” she said, as they stood by the sink in the hallway, quarter of an hour later ;

"Sollie, how could you do it?" Her voice was reproachful, and Sollie, whose fists were in his eyes, could not see her face.

It was small wonder that Miss Sally's eyes twinkled, as she looked down at the abject little figure before her. Soiled and smeared from head to foot, his starch gone, his collar and tie vanished, his coat slit from neck to hem, his face grimed from contact with the ground and irrigated with tears, Sollie stood there, his chubby body quivering with sobs, his chubby fists digging into his eyes and spreading the mire over his face. Miss Sally watched him for a moment; then the merri-ment left her eyes and, stooping, she gently took his chin in her hand and turned his face upward.

"Tell Miss Sally all about it," she said.

Sollie choked, sobbed, choked again, then found his voice.

"Look it!" he said huskily. "Me an' dem fellers wuz goin' ter have somethin' to eat, an' one er us had ter go ter git it. We wuz 'fraid yer would n' let us out'n de yard, so we

t'ought we could crawl under. Dey took me, 'cause I wuz de littles', an' I got stuck. I did n' mean ter be bad, Miss Sally; but 't wuz de firs' time dey 'd done a thing but sass me, an' dey said 't would be fun, an' dey planned it, an' — an' I wuz de littles', an' — had ter go, an' — an' — an' all de udders said dey wisht dey wuz de ones; but 't would n' be fair ter go, w'en I wuz de one, an' — an' — an' my mudder'll hit me, w'en she sees dese clo'es."

But by this time, Miss Sally had grasped the situation. She departed in pursuit of the Minor Prophets; but the Minor Prophets had likewise departed, chuckling, as they went, over the full success of their undertaking.

II.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

UP-TOWN on the avenue, the rose season was at its height. Clumps of them, pink and white and red, were scattered about the smooth-cropped lawns, and some of the older houses were wreathed in trailing rose-sprays whose perfumed petals made sweet the air inside the great cool rooms. Down in Rose Street, there were only two reminders of the name, the signs on the street corners and the pudgy figure of little Rosie Mastenbrend.

Rosie was two years old ; this was her first season of knowing the resources of the street as a playground. However, she had taken to it with all the fervor of inherited tastes, and this first hot day of the summer found her seated on the curbstone with her feet in the gutter, studying the prints of her little bare toes in the mud left by a recent trip of the watering

cart. Her cousin, Sallie Luyckx, two years older than herself, was beside her. Sallie was already quite at home in the street, and she showed something of the pleasure of a trained artist, as she watched the lines of thin black mud ooze up between her toes and spread towards her thin ankles in a creamy, inky tide. Rosie was young. She might kick and spatter to her heart's content. By the time she had reached Sallie's age, she would have learned the full delight of "making toes" in all manner of intricate patterns.

Both the children looked up, as Sheba Antz came towards them. They drew away from her a little, with the instinctive repulsion of childhood, for, in the vernacular of Rose Street, Sheba's back was "humpy." Worse than that, it was not a legitimate hump between her shoulders; but it jutted sharply out, half way down her spine, and caused the tin decorations of her blue plush belt to assume undue prominence. Below her scant skirts, Sheba's feet were stubby and bare; above her faded waist her hair hung lank and thick, and her face was

redeemed from ugliness only by the great dark eyes which stared out at life with the same steady, hungry wishfulness which one occasionally sees in the eyes of a thoroughbred setter.

Mrs. Antz frankly confessed herself disappointed in her daughter, whom, at the red and flabby stage of existence, she had hopefully named Sheba. Unfortunately, Sheba had failed to live up to the glory of her name. Mrs. Antz, like too many mothers of the tenements, had never felt the need of caring which end up she held her baby, scarcely whether she held her at all. It was much more interesting to sit in the street doorway and exchange pleasantries with her neighbors; yet it had been upon one such occasion that her nervous system had met with a distinct shock. Baby Sheba, left to herself upstairs, had ventured upon a voyage of discovery into the hallway. Ten minutes later, Mrs. Antz heard a shrill cry, then a thudding, pounding sound; and a lump of baby humanity struck against the small of her back.

Most children would have died from the effects of the fall ; but Sheba was perverse. She neither lived nor died ; she merely existed for long months until her mother's patience was quite exhausted. Then she crowned her misdeeds and completed her mother's exasperation by growing a hump on her back. Five years later, a second child was born, and Mrs. Antz made another attempt at royalty, by naming him Solomon and by holding him tightly and with care. Sheba was relegated to the background, and upon little Solomon Mrs. Antz bestowed all the love which should have been divided between two children. Her sense of humor was not keen ; she saw no incongruity in making Sheba into a species of slave to do the bidding of young Solomon.

As Sheba drew near the gutter, she set down the basket and held out her hands to Rosie.

"Hullo, Rosie !" she said timidly.

Rosie put her arm up to her forehead. From its shelter, she eyed Sheba askance and held her peace.

"Rosie, come an' see Sheba," she urged,

stretching out her hands and waggling her fingers invitingly.

Rosie lowered her arm to the level of her eyes, and shook her yellow head violently.

"Oh, come! Come an' see wot Sheba's got in her basket. How d'yer know 'tain't a little w'ite chickerbiddy?"

As she spoke, she stooped and took Rosie's hand into her own. The child turned and struck at her with baby passion.

"Go 'way!" she shrieked. "Go 'way, Sheba Antz! I hate you, you humpy old Sheba! Go 'way!"

And Sheba submitted with a patience born of many such rebuffs. Turning, she picked up her basket and moved away; but her chin quivered, as she went.

"Where you been, Sheba?" her mother demanded, when Sheba set down her basket on the table.

"Ter git de cabbages. Yer sent me." Sheba's tone was sullen.

"Yer need n't er been all day. Seen Sollie?"

"No."

"W'y not?"

"'Cause I hain't."

Mrs. Antz glanced across at the clock on the tower of the brewery near by.

"It's time he wuz home. Go an' look fur him, Sheba."

"He don' wan' me. He's big enough ter come alone."

Mrs. Antz was prodding at her meagre fire. She paused to raise the poker threateningly.

"Go an' fin' yer brudder, Sheba!" she commanded. "Yer'd ought ter be proud ter be seen wid him, a humpy t'ing like yer. 'Stead er dat, I has ter sen' yer out ter look after him. Go along quick an' fin' him, er yer'll know de reason w'y." And Mrs. Antz, who was little more than a girl herself, dropped the poker with a clatter and made a stride towards her daughter.


Sheba soliloquized glumly, as she trudged down the two dark flights of stairs.

"Seems 's if dere wan' no place fur me, somehow. Nobody wan's me. Rosie yelled an' chased me off; my mudder sen's me out ter

git Sollie, an' w'en Sollie sees me he don' wan' me roun'. I wisht I had somebody dat wuz all mine, somebody dat would n' care, even if I am humpy. 'Tain't my fault dat my mudder spilled 'me w'en I's a kid; but dey takes it out 'n me, same's if I done it a purpost. Er course, dere 's Toni. He ain't so bad; but he's moved away, an' dat's de end er him. Wisht I wuz daid, er else married an' had a kid er my own! Bet yer I'd hang on ter it good an' tight, an' 't would have kinky yaller hair an' a big red pettercut."

She came out of the lightless stairway and stood blinking in the full glare of the late afternoon sunshine. Then, forgetful of past insults, she made a detour into the roadway and plucked Rosie Mastenbrend from the path of an approaching dray. Rosie pounded her face, by way of expressing gratitude; but Sheba's hold only relaxed when the curbstone was reached. Rosie went back to her gutter and Sheba halted to look about her.

"Wot yer doin' ter dat kid?" Dannie Mastenbrend demanded sharply.



"Wot yer done ter my brudder?" she retorted.

It was a random shot, but it met its mark. Dannie shifted his eyes from Sheba's eyes to the farther side of the street.

"Done nothin'," he replied sullenly.

"Yer know yer lie," Sheba said calmly. "W'ere is Sollie?"

"How sh'd I know?"

"Yer do know, I bet. Was n't he ter de playgroun', dis aft'noon?"

"Yep."

"Yer seen him in dere?"

"Yep."

"W'y ain' he come home, den?"

Dannie shrugged his shoulders.

"D' know. He ain' no kid er mine. If yer's so scairy 'bout him, w'y don' yer come ter de playgroun' an' look out fur him, yerself?"

"I'm too big."

The excuse was not genuine, and Dannie was quick to see its falseness.

"Yer mean yer's too humpy," he responded cynically. "I s'pose yer t'ink de fellers 'd all

be yellin' at yer. W'y don't yer tell dat dood of a Sol ter lick 'em?"

Sheba turned on him with some spirit,

"He 'd have ter lick you, first er all, Dannie Mastenbrend. Yer 's de sassiest er de lot."

Dannie's eyes narrowed to a line, as he surveyed her from top to toe.

"Don' yer never feel like sassin' yerself, w'en yer looks in de glass?" he retorted.

Sheba prudently waived that question and returned to her first subject.

"W'ere 's Sollie?"

"D' know."

"W'ere 'd yer see him las'?"

"In de playgroun'."

"Wot wuz he doin'?"

"Blubberin' all over Miss Sally's clo'es, an' hangin' on ter her han'."

"Wot fur?"

"'Cause he 'd sp'ilt his pretty w'ite pants."

"How 'd he spile 'em?" Sheba demanded excitedly. She had been present at the arraying of Solomon in all his glory; she had heard the maternal injunctions to be careful of his clothes,

and from past domestic episodes she could picture the maternal wrath which would arise at the sight of the injured finery.

Dannie read her thought shrewdly. He sought to add fuel to the flame.

"He's tore'd his coat awful, too; an' he's busted off his collar. He'll git a lickin' from his mudder, w'en he gits home, an' so'll you, too, fur not lookin' out fur him. Poor little dood! He don' stan' no chanst wid de big fellers."

"Yer'd ought ter go ter de playgroun' wid him, Sheba," Amos Budesheim suggested, as he lounged up to the group, with his cap much awry and his fists in his tattered pockets. "Den yer could have fun, an' look out fur Sol, too. He's too cunnin' ter be let run roun' loose, widout nobody ter see he keeps his clo'es clean. If yer'd go, too, dere'd be a pair er freaks er yer."

Sheba's eyes blazed with sudden fury, and her arm shot outward. The next instant Amos lay on top of Rosie in the gutter. Then the girl turned to Dannie.

"Yer see wot yer gits fur sassin' me," she

explained tranquilly. "I may be humpy, but I ain' no fool. Now shut up your laffin' an' tell me who de big fellers is dat laid fur Sollie."

Dannie averted his face and hesitated. His show of reluctance lasted just long enough for him to send a grimace of derision in the direction of Amos, who had picked himself out of the gutter and seated himself on the curb. Then Dannie's shifty eyes looked up into Sheba's honest ones.

"Sure yer won' tell? I do' wan' ter have 'em lickin' me," he questioned.

"Yer need n't be scairt. Nobody's going ter tech yer. Who wuz it?"

"'T wuz—" Dannie hesitated again.

"Who wuz it?" Sheba repeated steadily.

"'T wuz—Toni an' Adam."

Sheba looked at him sternly for a minute, then she swung around on her heel.

"Yer know yer's lyin'. Toni's de only frien' I got, an' he wouldn't tech Sollie. B'sides, he moved out'n de street, ter-day. Adam hain't got a mean streak in him. He had a kid er his own dat died, an' w'en he hits

a kid, he ain't Adam Dombowski. I'll ask him, if yer says so, an' see wot he says fur hisself. Here he comes now."

But with a patter of feet and a whisk of ragged elbows, Dannie and Amos vanished into an alley, just as the missing Solomon came into view at the end of the street. Sheba descended upon him summarily. She felt the disgrace of his appearance, not so much because of his spoiled finery as because it was palpable that he had had the worst of the encounter, whatever it might have been.

Sheba was not altogether in favor of the public playgrounds. To her mind they savored of school, and school in summer should have no part in the life of a freeborn American of Polish extraction. She had viewed the playground from her fire-escape, and she had condemned it without reserve. The games and the swings were only the sugar-coating of the educational pill. Moreover, the children had spied her from afar and had hooted in derision at the misshapen little figure above them. Accordingly, she had withdrawn herself from the

fire-escape and betaken herself to the side window whence she commanded a view of the one dentist's office which the street afforded. There, at least, she was safe from derisive comment. The dentist's back was towards her; a dinner napkin and a patch of black rubber effectually shut in any hostile demonstrations on the part of his victim. And yet she occasionally wondered a little about the trim, dainty woman in the buff shirtwaist, whom she had seen talking to Adam Dombowski and allowing Sally Luyckx to investigate the fastening of her belt. If she represented the educational pill, Sheba would have been willing to swallow it promptly.

"Sollie Antz!" Sheba demanded sharply. "Wot yer done ter yerself?"

Under the sympathy of Miss Sally, Sollie's tears had dried. Now they burst forth afresh.

"Done nothin'," he wailed. "'T wan' me; 't wuz dat blame Hosie, an' Dan Mastenbrend, an' Amos. Dey said ter do it, an' 't would be fun, an' 't wan'. I got stuck, an' sp'ilt my clo'es, an' dey all laffed, an' I'll hit 'em." He

doubled up his fists and then, in want of a better victim, turned upon Sheba. "An' ye'r laffin', too, Sheba Antz!" he said fiercely. "Lemme 'lone, yer wicked girl! I do' wan' yer 'roun'. I'll tell my mudder wot yer said, an' she'll lick yer, see if she don'."

His predictions were fulfilled. Sheba's explanations were cut short with a thump of the rolling pin, and Sheba retired from the fray to nurse a bruise on her cheek and to digest a reproof for not taking care of her "purty little brudder who looked like a dook in dem clo'es he'd sp'ilt," while she vaguely wished that, years before, she had shown a little more determination in the matter of dying.

III.

IN THE MISSION.

"ISABEL!"

"Jack!"

"You women that slum are a great bore."

"I don't slum."

"No; you only help run a playground plant, and keep the children from the inevitable demoralizations of a summer in the streets. It amounts to the same thing; you all beg without ceasing."

Isabel Dering laughed, as she glanced up at the figure of her cousin, who lounged in the doorway with Micky, her pampered Yorkshire terrier, cuddled in the curve of his elbow. Jack Edmunds was certainly good to look at, erect and slight, with a thin, clean-cut face, dark hair, and keen blue eyes. By no possibility could he be mistaken for anything other than a gentleman.

"What is it now, Jack?"

"It is Mrs. J. Abercrombie Smythe. She runs the Mission in Rose Street; therefore she must be a collaborateur of yours."

"Not so much as she fondly imagines. I asked Adam if the boys ever went to the Mission, and he said their fathers would n't let them, 'cause all de fellers dat went ter Mission turned into bums.'"

"You'd better send that fact to Mrs. J. Abercrombie Smythe to be embodied in her annual report. It might choke off some of her zeal."

"What does she want of you?"

"Singing, of course. That appears to be the one thing I am good for."

"When?"

"Sunday night. Don't you want to go? I'll engage a seat on the platform for you."

Miss Dering hesitated.

"If I won't be in the way, Jack. What shall you sing?"

"That's the question. It is Scylla and Charybdis, a Christian mission in a Jew quar-

ter. I think I'll try *Allah*, for one. It is a good song, and it's not exactly denominational. How is your own plant working?"

"This is only the first week; but it starts off well, if numbers are any test. All last season's Minor Prophets are in attendance, and I infer that the Judges are to be added unto them, for Gideon Golwicz has already appeared. I am teaching six boys that thimbles are not usually worn in their pockets, and five of them are teaching the sixth that he is of no account of all, because he was n't in the class, last year. Shall I order a delegation to hear you, Sunday night?"

"Heaven forbid!" her cousin responded fervently.

However, they came, without being ordered.

According to the calendar, dog days were quite three weeks distant; according to the barometer, they had arrived on that Sunday morning. By evening, the Rose Street atmosphere suggested a Turkish bath, tinctured with stale bean soup. The roadway was a sodden mixture of mud and refuse, and the sidewalks were

sticky with slime tracked there by countless bare or booted feet. The drizzle had ended at sunset, and now the street was crammed with its population, which had betaken itself out of doors in search of the cooler air which did not come. There were groups of arguing men, knots of gossiping women, strings of pushing, jostling, bare-legged children. Now and then there was a slight scuffle; but, for the most part, they were too depressed by the weather even to be quarrelsome.

The weather extended to the avenue; nevertheless, Miss Dering and her cousin were distinctly of hilarious mood, as they came tramping around the corner into Rose Street. Miss Dering herself was usually inclined to be jovial; it was never possible for her to be anything else, when she was in the society of her cousin whose real genius in no way hindered his being a normal, rollicking boy.

"And so we were tied at the fifth hole," he was explaining, when of a sudden he broke off. "My sainted uncles! What's the row?"

There was a whoop of rapture, a dash, a

scramble ; then a perceptible share of the population of Rose Street came sweeping down upon them. It was the first time that Jack Edmunds had visited the quarter. He knew it well by reputation, however, and he cast a backward glance in search of a policeman. Then he thrust his roll of music inside his coat and planted himself firmly.

"What's the matter with you, Jack?" Miss Dering inquired.

Surprised at her calmness, he turned to stare at her. His surprise increased when he saw her waving her hand in the air.

"What in thunder is the matter with you?" he retorted.

"Nothing. The children are surprised to see me down here on Sunday ; that's all. Are n't they cunning, Jack? Here they come, Prophets and all! Well, Amos. Yes, Gideon, I thought I would come down here for a look at you."

Already the advance guard was upon her, and her merry eyes looked out from a tangle of dancing feet and hugging arms, and eager

child faces. It was not much, to be sure ; but to Isabel Dering it was a rich return for the three summers she had been among them, and her face lighted with pleasure as she listened and made answer to their shrill questions.

"Wot yer doin' down here?"

"W'ere yer goin'?"

"Oh, Miss Derin' ! Miss Derin' !"

"Say, is de playgroun' open ter-night?"

"Goin' ter Mission?"

"Say, Dannie ; look it ! Miss Derin' says she's goin' ter Mission."

"Gee ! I'll bet dere 'll be fun inter de Mission, ter-night. Say, Miss Derin', yer goin' ter make a speech?"

Her laugh was blithe and good to hear.

"No, Hosie. This gentleman is going to sing to you, and I came down with him."

Hosie surveyed the stranger with portly calm.

"Is he yer feller?" he inquired.

Jack Edmunds knew his cousin's reputation of being the most touch-me-not woman in her set, and he expected to see Hosie demolished

before his eyes ; but Miss Dering only laughed again.

"No, Hosie ; I have n't any 'feller.' We don't usually ask such questions, though. This is my cousin, Mr. Edmunds. Jack, these are my sewing boys, Hosie Wikrowski, Dannie Mastenbrend, Amos Budesheim."

Hosie and Dannie received the introduction with silence ; but Amos rose to meet the social emergency.

"Yer her reel, fur-a-fact cousin yit?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"But yer hain't never been ter de playgroun'."

"She never invited me."

"She'll let yer come, I bet. Wot yer goin' ter do at de Mission?"

"I am going to sing."

"Gee! Kin yer sing? Yer don' look it."

"I—I thought I could." Jack Edmunds faltered a little before the disbelief which resounded in the accent of Amos.

"Me an' de udder fellers'll come, den. We

don' go ter Mission, mos'ly ; but yer bet we 'll be dere, ter-night. Goin' ter sing *Boola?* "

As he took his place on the platform, that night, Jack Edmunds looked about him with some curiosity, more amusement. Universally acknowledged to be the best baritone of a musical city, he had long since ceased to know the spasms of stage fright ; yet, as he studied the scene before him, he frankly admitted to himself the difficulty of producing any effect upon such an audience, and he felt certain grave doubts regarding the artistic ability of the zealous young missionary who sat at the piano. She certainly was marking the time to a most amazing extent ; and, even in the simple hymn she was playing, she resolved the chords into discordant chaos. He cocked the whites of his eyes up at Miss Dering, who sat demurely between himself and the clergyman. Then he returned to his study of the place.

Directly at his feet, the front rows of chairs were filled with stolid-looking worshippers. Behind them came a row or two of young men and women, who held each other's hands and


emphasized the swinging rhythm of the hymn with head and foot and voice. Back of them, the open windows and the broad, arching door showed a strange background of flaring lights and moving figures. Under the glaring *Welcome* in the doorway, he could look across the street at the saloon over the way, and, in the pauses of the hymns, riotous songs came back in answering chorus. Between these two brightest spots in the street, the crowds roamed idly to and fro, listening, laughing, brawling at times, until hymn and song were drowned in the strident voices which rose between.

It was an arena where good and evil had met to fight to a finish, and the grim tragedy of the place was fast settling over Jack Edmunds, when all at once tragedy became lost in comedy. A patter of bare feet and a buzz of voices made themselves heard outside; and then there came trudging up the steps a knot of little children. They were of every known degree of shabbiness; their bare feet and legs were splashed with mud. Many of them were nibbling at *delicatessen* of dubious make, and one and all

waved burning joss-sticks as a guard against the hungry mosquitoes which were abroad, that night. Other children followed, and yet others, until the throng filled the doorway and blocked the steps and the sidewalk beyond. The buzz went on, and grew in volume, punctuated by little grunts of annoyance, as the children elbowed one another for places in the foremost rank. In the rear, larger children lifted the little ones to look; now and then a youngster caught Miss Dering's eye, and swung up a waving arm in glad recognition. Against the devout foreground, against the riotous background, this doorway seemed to the young man a snarl of pointing fingers and swaying joss-sticks.

He turned to his cousin to see how she was bearing this ovation in her honor. Her teeth were tight shut; but her dimples were showing themselves and her eyes were dancing as, behind the broad back of the pastor, she laid her finger on her lips and shook her head. From the doorway there came an answering murmur.

"Shut up; can't yer!"



"Stop scrougin'!"

"Miss Derin' says, ter shut up an' behave yerself!"

"Don' be so blamed fresh, Hosie! Miss Derin's got her eye on yer." And Adam Dombowski seized upon Hosie, drove him backward through the crowd, and deposited him in the street.


He nodded cheerily to Miss Dering as he reëntered the hall. Then he composed himself to listen to the singer who had stepped forward, just as two tiny boys pushed themselves into the front rank of the throng. Alike as two little peas, they were clad solely in overalls and neckties. One of them held in his hand a half-eaten ear of corn, which he gnawed ravenously, cob and all, pausing now and again to bite off a morsel, put it between his companion's lips and push it home with his own grimy thumb.

Jack Edmunds had chosen his songs with some degree of care, that night. His best should be given to these people, whose lives held so little that was really good. Neverthe-

less, his surroundings proved too much for him; the pent-up mirth within him crept into his voice, and the sudden apparition in the doorway so completed his ruin that he entirely missed his final upper note.

As the moment for *Allah* drew near, Miss Dering waxed nervous. She loved the song; she adored her cousin, and she feared for what might happen next. All through the talk by the pastor, Adam and the Prophets had been telegraphing to her in no dumb show. The crowding and the pointing increased, and the children were becoming tired and irritable. Obeying a sudden impulse, she noiselessly left the platform and went out through a side door and into the street.

Jack looked after her wonderingly. He wondered still more when he saw her come under the arch of the main doorway and take her stand in the midst of the crowd, which opened joyously to receive her. He saw her cuddle one curly head against her side; he saw her pluck off certain tattered caps, and he saw



the lifted finger, which stilled the murmur, as he rose.

"Allah gives light in darkness,
Allah gives rest in pain.
Cheeks that are white with weeping,
Allah paints red again."

Fate had endowed Jack Edmunds with a high, sweet baritone voice, and with a wonderfully sympathetic way of using it. From her place across the little hall, Isabel Dering assured herself that she had never heard him to better advantage. Clear and distinct, the last words fell over the hushed room; and then of a sudden Miss Dering felt a pull at her skirts. Turning, she saw a stranger face, a girl's face, with wistful dark eyes and a mop of stringy dark hair that was too short to veil the misshapen back. Miss Dering smiled, and held out her hand. The girl lifted her lips to Miss Dering's ears.

"Look it," she whispered hoarsely; "yer know dat man he 's singin' 'bout. Say, d' yer s'pose he could make my back git over bein' humpy?"

IV.

THE NEEDLE'S EYE.

"YEP, I'm here, ter-day."

"Where were you last time, Gideon?" Miss Dering asked.

"Home. My fader's makin' a new house, out'n de back yard, fur me an' my brudder ter sleep in."

"How much 'll it cost, Gideon?" inquired Amos Budesheim, who was of a thrifty turn of mind.

"Hunderd dollars, winders an' all. He's got de plunks ter pay fur it, all right."

"Say, Miss Derin'," Dannie interrupted; "my uncle, he made two t'ousand dollars in jus' one night."

Miss Dering raised her brows in a surprise which was not wholly feigned. Such wholesale and sudden earning was not the custom in

the conservative university circles in which she moved.

"How did he do that?" she inquired.

"Playin' cards wid anudder feller." Dannie's tone was most matter-of-fact.

"But don't you know that it is wrong, very wrong, to gamble?"

"Yep. He los' all his money de nex' night ter anudder man. He'd ought ter stopped sooner."

"Dere's nothin' like knowin' w'en yer've got enough," Adam Dombowski observed sententiously.

There was a pause, while Dannie wrestled with his needle and a piece of thread.

"Dey sings a song 'bout de needle's eye," he said grinly, at length; "but mine don' surpass dis t'read fur a cent. W'en I grows up, yer bet I won' be a tailor."

"I will, den," Hosie responded. "I'm goin' ter grow up an' make everybody's clo'es, 'cep' Miss Derin's. She's so old she'll be daid by den. Say, Miss Derin'."

"Well?"



From a photograph by J. K. DEWELL.

"DEY SINGS A SONG 'BOUT DE NEEDLE'S EYE."



"Dat feller er yourn, dat one dat sung at Mission, las' night, he 's a corker. He makes me t'ink er teacher, an' hain't he got a good loud voice?"

"I t'ought he wuz great," Adam burst out excitedly; "I did n' like de stuff he sung; did n' have no git-dere ter it, but he makes a whoppin' big noise."

"I got a riddle fur yer," Hosie interpolated. "Now don' nobody guess it, only Miss Derin'. Wot makes more noise dan a pig under a gate?"

The Minor Prophets were addicted to riddles, however ancient their origin. They pounced upon this one eagerly, while Miss Dering made mental note of the question to tell her cousin.

"I seen yer talkin' ter Sheba Antz, after meetin'," Adam pursued. By virtue of his seniority in the class he sat at Miss Dering's right hand, and he usually addressed her as "Miss Derin', dear."

"Yes. I never saw her before. I asked her to come into my sewing class, this afternoon," Miss Dering answered composedly.

The effect was electrical.

"Wot!"

"Humpy Sheba!"

"Sheba Antz in dis class! Not if I knows it!"

"W'y, she's nothin' but a girl, an' humpy at dat!"

"Sol Antz's sister! Gee! We'll all have ter turn inter doods!"

The disturbance died away, and a momentary calm followed the storm. Hosie Wikowski broke in upon it by saying flatly,—

"She ain't er goin' ter set by me."

"Ner me," Amos echoed.

"Me, nudder." Dannie's voice took up the new *motif* of the fugue.

"No, I did n't suppose she would. I thought I should tuck her in here, between me and my right-hand man. Then if you all get into a snarl at once, Adam can help her a bit, while I untangle the rest of you." And Miss Dering gave Adam a smile which almost atoned for the suggestion of his losing his cherished place.

"But wot does a girl wan' ter come inter a class er boys fur?" Amos remonstrated.

"She's too big, anyhow. We don' wan' such old children in de playgroun'," Dannie added. "Me an' my twin wuz eight in May, only de twin's daid."

Hosie sniffed contemptuously.

"I would n't be a twin, nohow. It's awful unlucky ter be a twin, Miss Derin'. One er 'em's sure ter die, an' yer can' nebber tell w'ich 't will be. Wot d'yer twin die of, Dannie?"

"Teeth," Dannie replied briefly.

"Dat's bad," Adam said soberly. "It's wot killed my kiddie, las' summer."

Miss Dering understood his accent, for she knew that Adam still mourned for the little bit of humanity which had so constantly filled his tired arms.

"It was too bad, Adam," she said gently, as, for one instant, she laid her slim brown hand across his ragged sleeve; "but it ought to make you very happy to be able to remember that you were always good to him."

Adam sucked in his lower lip, then shut his teeth on it. Finding these measures inadequate, he brushed his sleeve across his eyes.

Miss Dering, meanwhile, rejoiced that the conversation had strayed from the subject of Sheba. Her rejoicing was premature, for Dannie Mastenbrend was only awaiting a pause in order to recur to his theme.

"Wot fur does a humpy t'ing like dat Sheba Antz wan' ter know how ter sew?" he demanded.

"Hush!" Miss Dering said, with more sternness than she had ever shown to the Prophets before. "Here she comes!"

Ignorant of the unwritten law of the playgrounds, Sheba had made no effort to improve her personal appearance before making her *début* in the sewing class. The mire of the previous evening was still to be seen upon her bare legs; her hair dangled, straight and unkempt, around her face; and her blouse, held in place by two pins in front, yielded at the shoulders to the attraction of gravitation. Petticoats were lacking, and her single scant skirt lopped dejectedly against her knees. Across the yard, Solomon, in a new pink jumper and a broad blue tie, sat on the edge


of the sandbin and communed with himself in solitary splendor.

On the threshold, Sheba paused to look about her in amazement. The kindergarten room of School Number Seven was as sunny and pleasant a spot as one could find that day. Flowers were everywhere, pictures hung on the walls, and an aquarium of goldfish brightened the one shady corner. The only bit of breeze astir, that afternoon, came in at the broad south windows, and set nodding the yellow field lilies in the vase on the piano.

Gathered into tight little knots here and there in the room were the sewing classes, girls mostly, with an occasional boy dropped into their midst. For two afternoons in the week, patchwork and enthusiasm reigned supreme; yet nowhere else did both patchwork and enthusiasm reach so high a stage of development as in the class of boys presided over by Miss Dering. They were the first to come; they were the last to go. They worked with a frantic haste which ignored all petty distinctions between sewing and basting; and, mean-

while, they talked unceasingly, punctuating their remarks by stealing one another's caps, upsetting one another's chairs, and belaboring one another in the ribs until Miss Dering became firmly convinced that their riotous behavior was ten times as great as the square of all the other disturbance in the room. And yet, they were so happy! And they were really improving! Hosie always said "please," now; Dannie had omitted to swear for fully four days; and Amos Budesheim had waved ten clean toes in mid-air, the last time that Gideon had upset him. But it was into this tempestuous assembly that Miss Dering proposed to introduce Sheba.

It had been a wonderfully strong, soft little hand that had closed on Sheba's hand, the night before. The girl wondered how anything so little could be so strong and so steady. She stole a glance up at the face beside her after a while, and it seemed to her that the same strength and steadiness were in the lips which shut closely, not hung loose like her mother's lips. And what a strange dress for Sunday



night! No lace trimming, no broad hat, not a ring on the fingers that held hers so closely. The short skirt was spotless and trim; the buff waist, the very same waist she had seen in the playground on week days, was crisp with starch; and the sailor hat rested on hair which lay like spun metal, smooth and glossy and fluffy.

As soon as the benediction was spoken, Miss Dering gently released the curly head at her side and laid her hand on Sheba's shoulder.

"I don't believe I've seen you before," she said kindly.

"Maybe not. I seen yer in de playgroun', though."

"Do you come to the playground?"

"Nah. My brudder Sol does."

"What is your name, dear?" Miss Dering asked, while she rapidly ran over all the Sols of her acquaintance, and tried to connect the girl with one of them.

"Sheba Antz. Sollie Antz, he's my brudder." She spoke with a curious mingling of pride and bitterness.

"Sol Antz? Sol? Oh, you mean cunning little fat Sollie in the duck trousers."

The next instant, Miss Dering would have given much to recall her careless words. Sheba flushed and hung her head, as she tried to withdraw her hand from Miss Dering's grasp.

"Wait a minute, Sheba. I want to talk with you a little bit more. I know so many of the children here that it seems too bad for me not to get acquainted with you. Do you often come to the Mission?"

"Nah, I hain't never been here before. I come dis time 'cause dey wuz all sayin' yer 'd be here. I seen yer talkin' ter Adam, an' I wanted ter git anudder look at yer."

"Adam Dombowski?"

"Yep. I know him an' Toni, Toni Valovick, only Toni's moved away."

"Yes, I know it. We shall miss him," Miss Dering said heartily, for in that changing, shifting population, Toni's unfailing loyalty to the playground had been a real source of inspiration. "Why don't you ever come to the playground with Sollie?"

"I 'm too big."

"No, you 're not."

"Do' wan' ter."

"Why not?"

"Do' wan' school in summer."

"But this is a place to play. Ask Sollie if he does n't have a good time," she persisted.

"He has a good time enough," Sheba answered honestly.

"Then why don't you come with him?"

"He don' want me." Sheba blurted out the bare truth, then she looked up defiantly to see how Miss Dering accepted it.

She accepted it as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"You 'd better come alone, then."

"Wot would I do?"

"Sing and read books and play games."

"Who 'd play wid me?" Sheba's tone was sullen, but her eyes showed a gleam of hope as she looked up.

"I would, and a good many other people. I'll tell you, come, to-morrow afternoon, and join my sewing class."

"Do' know how ter sew."

"It's time you learned, then," Miss Dering said, with a blitheness she was far from feeling.

"I have six boys in my class, and we need one girl to keep us in order."

"Wot yer sewin'?"

"A bedquilt."

"I do' wan' no patchwork," Sheba said disdainfully.

"Some one else may, though."

"Who's de boys?"

"Adam, for one."

"Who elst?"

"Hosie and Amos and Dannie Mastenbrend."

"Dey'll sass my back," Sheba interrupted, with a scowl. "Dey alwuz does, an' 't wan' my fault dat my mudder dropped me an' sp'ilt me w'en I's a kid."

The arm around her shoulder tightened a bit.

"No, dear. But my boys won't tease you. I'll promise you that."

"Wot's yer name?" Sheba asked abruptly.

"Miss Dering."

"Derin'? Well, I guess dat's about right.

Mos' folks won' bodder ter hug me de way you 's doin'. An' yer won' let de boys sass me?"

"No."

"Ner call me humpy?"

"No, Sheba, not if I can help it."

"Well." The girl drew a long, slow breath. "Well, I'll come," she added, with sudden briskness; "but yer bet I'll smash 'em, if dey tries ter be too fresh wid me. G' night. Yer feller's waitin' fur yer." And she vanished into the crowded street.

V.

ON THE FACE OF THE WATERS.

"Go *roun'* dan *roun'* de village,
As *you* have *done* before."

HOSIE WIKROWSKI was threading himself in and out under the uplifted arms of the circle of children whose wrists were stretched to the utmost by his tubby proportions. His spectacles caught the light and set him to blinking, turning him to the likeness of a little owl. He continued his gyrations until it became time for him to "go stan' before yer lover." Then he came to an abrupt halt and stared about him. The chorus repeated the refrain with insistent emphasis.

Miss Dering stood facing him in the ring. As she caught his eye, she stopped singing, and made a slight gesture which Hosie was prompt to interpret.

"Do' wan' ter," he responded flatly.

"Do' wan' ter wot, Hosie?" Amos Budesheim piped, from across the ring.

"Do' wan' ter choose dat Sheba Antz," Hosie replied, with scant consideration for Sheba's probable feelings.

"Who wants yer ter, yer softie?"

"Miss Derin'. She's a-winkin' at me ter do it; but yer bet I won'." Hosie's voice rang out clearly, during a prolonged rest in the song.

"Yer bet I do' wan' ter be chose, Hosie Wikrowski," Sheba retorted angrily.

"Humpy!"

"Fattie!"

The ring broke ranks summarily and clustered about the contestants, buzzing like angry bees. It chanced that Hosie was sensitive about his figure. Red as a little turkey gobbler, with his fists doubled and his mortarboard cap awry, he was making a fierce lunge at Sheba, when a strong hand held him back.

"Yer little sneak! I'd be ashamed ter hit a girl." Adam Dombowski's voice was as ungentle as his hand.

"Shut up!" Hosie was too excited to heed

the fact that his foe was two years and four inches his superior.

"Don't yer hit her, den." And Adam shook him by the back of his blouse, not violently as yet, but merely as a reminder that violence might follow, if his blood were really roused.

"Le' me be ! "

"W'en I gits good an' ready. Will yer let Sheba Antz alone? "

"She's bigger'n me. Yer might let her fight fur herself; she's able," Hosie protested, puffing vigorously, both as a result of his own emotions and of the shaking which Adam had given him.

"She's bigger; but she's a girl, an' a humpy one at dat. I wisht she'd cuff yer out'n de playgroun'; but I don' s'pose she will."

"I wuz here before she came."

"Maybe; but I bet yer won' be here much longer. If yer hit her, I'll chase yer out'n dis yard, 'nless Miss Derin' does it first. Ah-h-h-h-h! Se' down somewhere an' get yer wind! Yer too fat an' too soft ter be wuth fightin', anyhow." And Adam picked up

Hosie by the slack of his blouse, walked him across the yard and set him down in the pail where the children were wont to refresh their thirsty throats. Then, his fists in his pockets, he marched back to Miss Dering.

"Sorry," he said briefly. "I know yer don' wan' us ter be scrappin', Miss Derin', dear ; but somebody'd got ter lay fur him, an' yer could n' do it. 'Tain't a fit job fur wimmin, an' b'sides, yer'd squish up yer cuffs."

Miss Dering repressed her merriment as best she could. Her sense of humor was a keen one, and Hosie had looked such a chubby Humpty Dumpty, as he sat in the light yellow pail !

"I don't like fighting a bit, Adam. Could n't you have managed Hosie in any other way?" she asked.

"How, den?"

"Talk to him, get all the boys to show a little chivalry. It's only a sneak that would tease a girl like Sheba."

Adam's face reflected the gravity of Miss Dering's eyes.

"Oh, Hosie is a sneak, all right," he asserted. "De only way wid dem fellers is ter hit 'em an' knock de sass out 'n 'em. But I don' see wot fur Sheba wan's ter come ter de playgroun'."

"For the same reason that you do," Miss Dering retorted.

Adam looked up. Then he laughed.

"You ain't her teacher, Miss Derin'. I been here t'ree years, an' — an' yer wuz awful good ter my kiddie."

The answer was rather inconsequent. Nevertheless, Miss Dering understood.

"Sheba has n't any kiddie, Adam; but she has a queer back. Let's be good to that."

"Wot fur?" Adam asked literally. "Backs hain't got sense, like a kid. Hers is awful funny; but I don' see how we kin be good ter it."

"By not laughing at it; by not letting the others make fun of her, and by being gentle with her."

"Sheba Antz ain't gentle, yer bet. She's a peach wid her fists."

"Because she has had to use them all her life," Miss Dering responded quickly. "Give her a chance, when she does n't have to fight for her place, and she'll be gentle enough. Now, Adam, listen, dear boy. You've helped me a good many times. Help me now with Sheba."

A smile puckered Adam's lips.

"Did n' I help yer, w'en I stuck Hosie inter de watterpail? Yer bet 't wuz full, too."

"Poor Hosie!" In spite of herself, Miss Dering laughed. "But next time, don't fight about it. Try to make Sheba have a good time here; act as if you forgot all about her back, and perhaps the others will forget it, too."

Adam wavered.

"Play wid her, an' dat?" he remonstrated, with the nasal accent which expresses extreme disgust.

"Yes."

"I'd radder lick de res' on 'em inter doin' it," he returned dejectedly. "But wot yer says, goes, Miss Derin', dear. If it's Sheba,

Sheba it is ; only I hain't got no uset fur girls, whedder dey 're flat-backed er humpy. Gee ! W'ere 's de udder fellers all gone ? ”

Miss Dering had been quite absorbed in her talk with Adam. Now she glanced up to see the black clouds hanging low over a deserted playground.

“ There 's a hard shower coming, Adam,” she said hurriedly. “ I think the others have been sent home. Scamper along quick, or the rain will catch you. And thank you, dear.”

Adam waited just long enough to seize Miss Dering's hand and rub his buttony nose against the palm in mute caress. Then his sanctified mood vanished. With a sounding whoop, he tore away as fast as his heels would carry him.

Fully an hour later, Miss Dering and the teachers were sitting in the kindergarten room, looking out on a rain-washed playground, while they waited for the downpour to subside enough to let them wade forth in search of a street car. The discussion of playground characters and interests had dragged itself to a

tedious end, and they were sitting in bored silence, when a masculine tread came down the hall. The next instant, a masculine voice broke in upon their stillness.

"Miss Dering here? Oh, Isabel, come out and play with me; don't waste your time on these hoodlums — Beg pardon, Miss Loomis, I was n't alluding to you. Here are your gum shoes and a brolly, Isabel. Array yourself in a hurry, and come out into Rose Street."

"Is n't it wet?" Miss Dering objected. "You were a good youth to come for me, Jack."

He ignored her thanks.

"Wet? I should say it was! The place is a second Venice, push-carts floating down the tide. I wish that beastly Mission piano would go and float with them. Come and see the fun. It is worth a pair of wet feet, I promise you."

Miss Dering cast a regretful glance down at her new shoes; then she looked up into her cousin's face, and she yielded to his enthusiasm.

"I'll come," she said meekly. "If you don't mind, Jack, I'd rather not go in wading

above my knees, but I suppose I must n't be too finicky."

Rose Street lay, channel-wise, between two higher streets, and the higher streets were but little above the sea level. At best, sewage was a problem. In a storm like the one which had just swept the city, it was not problematic at all. The sharp south wind had driven the rising tide back into the sewers to meet the wash from the streets and to force it backward until the manholes groaned and bubbled, then spouted back the water in a dingy, reeking tide. The side streets were flooded, and Rose Street itself was turned to a shallow river where, as Jack Edmunds had said, the push-carts had converted themselves into gondolas and were floating sluggishly to and fro in the middle of the street. Here and there, long wagons, licensed Number This and That, came splashing through the stream which lapped the sides of the struggling horse. The sidewalk stalls were soaked and sodden. There had been no time for the owners to rescue their wares; they could only retreat to shelter and

bar their doors and windows against the water which defied all barriers and carried waste on every hand.

It was only for a short time that the flood lasted. Then the water slowly sank away, receding inch by inch, and leaving in its place a thin coating of disease-laden mire which should have been an offence to the sunlight that was beginning to pierce through the clouds. No one had been to blame; no one had been responsible for the spoiling of the entire belongings of many a family in that crowded quarter of the city. It had been unavoidable; but it was none the less pitiful, and Jack Edmunds felt no desire to laugh, as he watched the frowzy old woman who stood knee deep at her doorway, vainly trying with her broom to sweep back the water rushing down the steps and into her basement home.

However much their elders might suffer, the children were in their glory. As the water went down, they came swarming out into the street, wading and splashing to and fro, sailing board boats laden with *débris* from the flooded

stalls, shouting gleefully to each other and to the on-lookers in the windows above their heads. It mattered not to them whether the water were thick with microbes, or crystal clear. It was wet; it was also very cool. Best of all, it was an event such as had not happened before within the memory of man. It was much better fun to go wading waist-deep in Rose Street than to walk blocks upon blocks in search of a public bath. They kicked and splashed madly, determined to make the most of the fun while it lasted.

Unlike most of the children, Sheba had gone directly home from the playground. Solomon was slower about appearing. As a rule, a Rose Street mother is satisfied if her children show themselves at bedtime; but Sollie was his mother's pride and, under such unusual conditions, she became anxious about him. Furthermore, she became anxious about his new pink jumper. She had not bought it with a view to its being washed, and it might not prove to be fast color. Mrs. Antz rested her broad, flat hands on the sill, and craned her

neck to look down into the street. Then she drew in her head, and turned to Sheba.

"W'y did n't yer bring Sollie home wid yer?" she demanded angrily.

"He would n' come wid me." Sheba's voice was sullen. In fact, her mother would not have recognized the tone in which her young daughter was wont to reply to Miss Dering's questions.

"Yer did n' try ter git him. Mos' likely yer scolded him, an' he wuz afraid er yer. Yer 'd ought ter be proud er havin' such a boy fur yer brudder, an' not go naggin' at him, day in an' day out. Course he 'd er been glad ter come wid yer, if yer 'd only talked nice ter him."

"I did n' talk nohow ter him. He won' never come near me," Sheba retorted.

"More shame on yer, den! It's yer own fault, if he don' love yer. Yer should n' be such a cross-grained thing. Now go an' fin' Sol, an' be quick about it; er I'll see yer don' go ter de playgroun' ag'in. Playgroun'! Yer need n't t'ink yer goin' ter bring yer fine-lady playgroun' airs here! All I let yer go fur is

ter see dat Sollie keeps hisself clean an' has a fair show wid de res' er 'em."

Sheba's head was aching, her back felt more than usually humpy. Nevertheless, she drearily went away out of the room and down the stairs.

"Hi, Hosie! Here comes Sheba an' de dood!" Dannie shouted from afar.

Hosie was polishing on his jumper a pear which he had rescued from the gutter. At Dannie's hail, he looked up to see Sheba plashing wearily towards him through the six or eight inches of water still left on the sidewalk. Astride her hump sat Sollie, shorn, alas! of his glory. Sodden and water-soaked, his jumper had parted with its pinkness and stained itself generously with the vivid blue of his erstwhile jaunty necktie. The general depression had penetrated from his limp hat to his small brain, and he was wailing lustily while he belabored Sheba's sides with his sturdy toes.

At the first sight, Hosie's spectacles gleamed ominously. The insult of the waterpail was still uppermost in his mind, although the local

and involuntary bath had been only a prelude to the general one he had sought for himself. Not only had Sheba been the indirect cause of the insult, but she was the safest victim on whom to wreak his vengeance. Three years' constant association with Toni Valovick had taught Adam to smite cunningly and with strength. All in all, Hosie preferred Sheba to Adam for his antagonist.

It took one instant for Hosie to concoct his plan of action, another instant to carry it out and hook his toes around Sheba's ankle, as she staggered forward under her heavy burden. There was a cry, a splash, a mocking yell ; and Sheba lay face downward in the mire, with Hosie dancing about her and taunting her like a pudgy little gnome.

Then came the third instant, and in its train it brought ruin upon Hosie. From some unseen quarter, Adam Dombowski hurled himself upon the group. He seized Hosie with one hand, with the other he picked up Sol who was beating a tattoo upon Sheba's neck. For a second, he hesitated ; then he bumped Sollie's head

against that of Hosie, pushed both boys into the gutter and, stooping, lifted Sheba to her feet. Sir Walter Raleigh might have done the deed more gracefully, but never with a better grace.

"Now look it," he said, as he brushed the wet hair away from the girl's cheeks; "if Hosie Wikrowski an' his gang lays fur yer ag'in, jus' yer come an' call me. I ain't got no uset fur girls, but I ain't er goin' ter have 'em monkeyed wid, if I kin stop it. I wuz Toni's chum, an' Toni liked yer, so it's up ter me ter see yer gits fair play. I ain't got no chum now. I do' wan' none. But so long's I hain't got nobody ter go roun' wid, I'm goin' ter put in my time lickin' any feller dat hits yer. See? 'T won' hurt yer none ter have somebody ter look out fur yer, an' Miss Derin' wuz jus' sayin' she's 'fraid my muscle 'll git soft. G'by. Yer git 'long home, an' I'll send yer dood brudder after yer, short metre."

From a side street, Isabel Dering and Jack Edmunds watched the little scene to its close. Then Jack turned to his cousin.

"Humanity is a good deal alike, Isabel," he said sententiously. "It's half cad, half gentleman, wherever you find it. I'll bet on your Adam, every time!"

VI.

THE FAITHLESSNESS OF SOLOMON.

"Mistress Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?"

JACK EDMUNDS rested his arms on the low stone wall and peered over it at his cousin, as he delivered himself of the nursery song in his most impassioned stage manner.

Isabel Dering rose from the midst of a patch of vivid nasturtium blossoms. At her side, his pink ribbon untied and trailing over the orange flowers, Micky abandoned his hunt for a flea, and waved his tongue at Jack in friendly greeting.

"Your voice is in perfect form, Jack ; never better ; but I do wish you would leave off warbling, and come to help pick. I never shall get these done in time."

"Ungrateful girl ! And some people are

glad to pay real paper money for the luxury of hearing me sing. Wherefore this mad haste?" And, taking the wall at a bound, he came to sit on his heels in the flower bed.

"Don't sit on Micky, Jack! It is sewing day, and I shall be late. It is two o'clock now."

"But you don't sew flowers. I'll bet that Adam and the Prophets are n't up to high-art embroidery yet, in spite of all your efforts to evolve them."

"What nonsense! I'm not a crank, Jack."

"Precious near it," he returned gravely.

"Wait and see. You said, last week, that Adam was a worthy subject for our efforts."

"He was. The way he elected himself champion of that little humpback was superb. She is n't of the type to appeal to the average boy; and I rejoiced in Hosie's downfall."

His tone was still grave. Isabel Dering's gravity broke up in a laugh.

"You know you spite Hosie because he compared you to a pig under a gate, Jack. But Adam is a dear. He is fighting all Shoba's

battles now, at least three battles a day. The worst of it is, I suspect he is moved thereunto, not only by chivalry, but by an inherent desire to show the might of his arm. Adam does love dearly to 'scrap,' as he terms it, and this gives full scope for his talent in that direction."

"And the flowers?" her cousin queried. "Have n't you almost enough? I'm breaking my back over this confounded bed."

"How many have you?"

He held up a dozen blossoms, stubby-stemmed, broken-spurred.

"Is that all? You are a dear boy, Jack; but your talents lie in other directions. Next time, you may go on with your singing."

"By the way," he asked idly; "did n't I see that girl at the Mission, the night I sang?"

"Yes, that was the night I discovered her. I forgot to tell you about it before."

Jack's eyes softened at the little story.

"Poor little sinner! I don't know but we may be shirking most of our responsibilities off upon Allah, Isabel. I wish I knew how to do some good; but it all seems so futile."

"It's the drops that fill up the bucket," Miss Dering answered epigrammatically, as she rose and brushed the dust from her skirt.

"But the bucket is so large and so leaky."

"Then it needs all the more drops. Good-by, Jack. I must go." And she left him standing there with Micky in the nasturtium patch, now shorn of all its color.

"Dere's Miss Derin'! Gee! She's got flowers ter burn!" Dannie hailed her coming enthusiastically.

"Dat's fur us fellers in de class," Hosie added promptly, for it was always his choice that few should have a share in his blessings.

"No; there are enough for everybody," Miss Dering answered, holding the blossoms high above the heads of the boys who swarmed about her.

"Oh, but jus' give 'em ter us, an' den everybody'll know dat we's yer class," Amos coaxed ingratiatingly.

But Miss Dering shook her head.

"They will know that in other ways, selfish boy! And what about the children who can't

have room to come inside and sew? They ought to have the flowers, not you, to even things up."

"Dey don' wan' ter come," Hosie returned promptly. "Dey 'd radder stay outside an' do stunts in de yard. Dere's a show goin' on now. Come an' git a look at it, 'fore yer goes inside."

Across the yard, an amateur vaudeville was in full swing, and Miss Dering yielded to the enthusiastic tuggings which were flecking her fresh shirtwaist with smudgy prints in the region of the belt and the elbows. She bestowed her applause impartially over three numbers of the programme; then she went away to put her flowers into water. She found Sheba alone inside the kindergarden room, nursing a discolored eye.

"Why, Sheba, what's the matter?" she exclaimed.

"I been teachin' dat Amos Budesheim wot's wot," Sheba returned nonchalantly. "He sassed me, an' den he hit me; but I knocked him endwise, 'fore I wuz done wid him. I bet

some day dose fellers 'll know I 'm not goin' ter take any sass from 'em."

"Where was Adam?" Miss Dering asked.

Sheba gave a hostile sniff.

"In his skin, I s'pose. I kin look out fur myself, an' de sooner dey knows it, de better. Adam's all right; but I'll have 'em know my fists 're's hard's deir heads, even if I am humpy. Say, Miss Derin', wot sort er flowers is dese?"

"Nasturtiums."

"Nast—wot? Ain't dey funny? Jes' like one er dese little monkey caps, an' see all de rags hangin' roun' inside! W'ere 'd yer git 'em?"

"In my garden."

"Grow dere?"

"Yes."

"All dese?"

"Yes, and a good many more."

Sheba drew in her breath in a reflective whistle.

"My, would n' I like ter see it! Dey makes yer nose feel awful funny; don' dey? Wot yer goin' ter do wid 'em?"

"Give them to you and to all the other children."

Sheba gasped.

"Ter — me?"

"Yes, some of them."

"Do' want 'em all ; dey'd be in de way. But I never had no flowers guv me before. Kin I have 'em ter keep?"

"Don't you ever go out into the country, Sheba?"

"Nah. Wot's de good er de country? Dere's nothin' doin' dere."

"Lots of good. You can find all sorts of flowers growing there, flowers growing wild that you can pick."

"Like dese?"

"Prettier."

"An' turkles," Hosie put in enthusiastically, as he joined them. "We wen' ter de country, one year, an' me an' Phillie Luyckx foun' two turkles, an' we mos' foun' a snake, only it ran off out er sight. 'T was a big one, too, longer'n dis room, an' big roun' as a watterpail. We wuz n' a bit afraid."

But Sheba refused to be impressed by his courage. She was hanging over the flowers, handling them with a gentle deftness which Jack Edmunds, for all his slim hands, might well have envied. And while she was handling them, she took a sudden great resolution born of the bright blossoms which were such as she had never seen before. All suppertime, her resolution was choking her. It insisted upon utterance ; yet, as often as she gathered courage to clear her throat and open her lips to speak, her fear caught her by the throat again until the pain of it was strangling her.

"Sol," she blurted out abruptly, at bedtime ;
"will yer come up ter Miss Derin's wid me, ter-morrer? "

"Nah ; I won'," Sollie snarled drowsily.

"W'y not? "

"'Cause I ain't er goin' ter."

"Come on."

"Le' me be ! Wot d' yer wan' ter go fur? "

he demanded.

"I wan' ter see her flowers."

"How d' yer know she's got none? "

"She has. Got lots." Sheba spoke more easily now, and with conviction.

"Did she tell yer?"

"Yep."

"Ask yer ter come?"

"N-no; but she'd let me, I know. Yer'll come wid me; won't yer, Sollie?" she urged hopefully.

Solomon closed his eyes languidly.

"Yer bet I won't! I ain't er goin' up on de avenoo wid a humpy t'ing like you, Sheba Antz. W'en I goes, I goes alone."

For once, Sheba's fists were passive. Instead, the color left her face, and her lips quivered.

Rather to the surprise of both children, Mrs. Antz came to the support of her daughter's request.

"Go wid her, Sol, if she wan's ter go. Yer'll have a good time, an' it's too fur fur yer ter go alone. I'll wash up yer w'ite pants an' yer dood collar ter-night; an' w'en people looks at yer, dey'll t'ink yer lives up dere, an' dat Sheba's yer nurse, takin' yer out fur a walk. G'long ter bed, Sheba; an' min' yer take my

Bosting bag wid yer, ter-morrer, so 's't if Miss Derin' gives yer anythin', yer can bring it home. She may have somethin' she wan's ter send me, yer know."

The next noon, accordingly, Sollie was arrayed in his festal garments, and started off to the playground, with strict orders to keep himself clean until such time as Sheba should appear, ready for their expedition.

"W'ere 's Sol?" she demanded of Miss Sally, an hour later.

"Sol? Your Sol? Let me see." Miss Sally glanced about her, reflectively. The playground was swarming, that hot afternoon, and among three hundred Prophets and Priests, even King Solomon had escaped notice. "Has any one seen Sollie Antz here, this afternoon?" she asked.

"I seen him goin' up University Street," piped Carrie Luyckx.

"W'ere wuz he goin'?" Sheba inquired.

"How sh'd I know? I never arst him."

"Yer might er knowed enough ter tell him ter come back," Sheba said sullenly.

"He ain't my brudder. I never knowed yer did n't wan' him up town."

"Who's dat? Sollie Antz?" Bennie Bronstein asked.

"Yep. Yer seen him?"

"I seen him up on Broadway, wid all his good clo'es on."

"W'ere wuz he?"

"In front er de big Blue Print grocery store."

"I don' see wot he wuz doin' dere." Sheba's voice was fretful, her face overcast with gloom.

All the morning long, she had toiled to do the bidding of her mother, finding drudgery sweetened by the anticipation of her afternoon trip up the avenue, and of her possible glimpse of Miss Dering. Perhaps Miss Dering's "feller" might live there, too; she might even chance to hear him singing, as she passed by. To Sheba's mind, people on the avenue toiled not, neither did they spin. Picking flowers and singing incomprehensible, but comforting, songs made up the tale of their day's doings. She longed to go to them, to see with her very own eyes how they looked when they were in their



From a photograph by J. K. Dewell.

THE PLAYGROUND WAS SWARMING THAT HOT AFTERNOON.



own homes, among their own kind. And yet an unaccountable shyness kept her from going alone. Sollie would be no real protector in case of need, neither would he be a congenial companion. Nevertheless, her going depended upon Sol's escort, and Sol had mysteriously disappeared.

"Wot wuz he doin' up dere?" she repeated, irritably.

"Tryin' ter git a chanst ter swipe a peach," Bennie responded, with a chuckle.

Sheba faced him angrily.

"Sollie Antz ain't no t'ief. He would n' swipe nothin'."

"W'y not? He would, if dere wuz n' a cop-per in sight, you bet," Hosie declared suddenly.


"Would not!"

"Jus' yer go an' watch him awhile, an' yer 'll see t'ings ter make yer eyes bung out. Sol'd swipe his own mudder's Sunday clo'es, if he t'ought he could trade 'em off fur a taffy." Hosie's tone was suggestive of virtuous disdain.

Trailing the limp Boston bag dejectedly,

Sheba turned away, and started up the street. She must find Sol at all hazards. He must go up the avenue with her ; likewise, he must be kept from stealing. Sheba's moral code was a simple one ; but it black-listed theft as a deadly sin. It was irreligious ; it was also punishable by a trip in the patrol wagon, and by yet other terrors beyond.

To her relief, as she rounded the corner by the Blue Print grocery, Sol was not in sight. She halted for a moment in indecision, shading her eyes with the hand that held the Boston bag, and peering about her, this way and that. Then her face cleared, for, far up the street, she caught a glimpse of two brief white legs. She overtook him in front of the University Club, where he was doing a cake-walk for the delectation of a group of men on the steps. Excited by the applause, and by the promise of pennies galore, Sol was heedless of her coming. Sheba bore down upon him swiftly, quite unconscious of the fact that, instead of singing *Allah* at home, Jack Edmunds was in the midst of the group of his friends.



"Come 'long, Sol! Stop yer foolin' an' come wid me," she ordered sharply, for she had a shrewd suspicion that the young men on the steps were making merry at her brother's expense.

Sollie started abruptly and looked over his shoulder. Then, quite as abruptly, he regained his composure and resumed his cake-walk.

"Is that your mother?" one of his audience asked, laughing.

"Dat ain't my mudder. My mudder is a laidy, an' wears silk clo'es. I do' know who dat is," he replied loftily, as he halted for breath.

Sheba seized him by the arm.

"Yer lie," she cried shrilly. "Yer do know me, too, an' yer promised ter go up de avenoo wid me, dis aft'noon, ter see de flowers. Come 'long."

Sollie eyed her cunningly.

"Oh, is dat you, Sheba?" he asked, as he shook off her hand. "It's a Sheeny girl dat my mudder hires ter take me out walkin'," he added, in an explanatory aside to the front rank of the group.

"No such a t'ing! I'm his sister. Come wid me, Sol Antz, er I'll lug yer off on my back," she ordered.

Her cheek reddened with the print of Sol's angry fingers.

"Go 'long home! Don't yer see I'm busy? She ain't my sister, nohow. I would n' have such a lookin' sister, an' she knows it, too."

Sheba's arm, raised to her cheek, could not conceal her face, distorted with pain, anger, and pitiful shame. Above her humpy back her shoulders shrugged themselves together, as if under physical blows; then they shook with rough, harsh sobs.

There was a silence, short but breathless. Then, out from the middle of the group, Jack Edmunds came striding down the steps and bent over the girl before him. His merry blue eyes were blazing with anger, but his lips were very gentle.

"Sheba," he said, as, with an awkward yet caressing touch, he laid his hand on her stringy hair; "Sheba, I would n't cry, seems to me.

He's a horrid little beast, and deserves a thrashing; but — don't you care."

Sheba shrank, and drew herself away from his hand. Then she spoke proudly, —

"He's my brudder Sol, an' him an' me wuz goin' up on de avenoo ter see a laidy wot lives dere, an' has flowers. My mudder said as we could go, an' she put on all his best clo'es. He lies w'en he says he did n't know me, an' — an' —" She gulped back the sobs which were once more shaking her; but they burst out again. "An' now yer all laffin' at me, an' I hate yer, hate yer like mad!"

Rousing herself to a sudden fury, she lifted the Boston bag, limp and empty as it was, and, wielding it as a lash, she struck Jack Edmunds with all the might of her arm. Then catching sight of Adam, who had followed her all the way from the playground, she rushed to his side, in search of the protection which she had learned would never fail.

VII.

THE TESTING OF LOYALTY.

ISABEL DERING had no idea of the place she held in the world of Sheba Antz. To Miss Dering, Sheba was only one of hundreds, a pitiful one, needing all the loving sympathy, all the help which could be lavished upon her ; but yet only one. To Sheba, Miss Dering was also only one ; in fact, the only one. No one else had ever taken the trouble to conceal the repulsion her misshapen back inspired, or to treat her like other children. No one else in Sheba's world was always dainty and spotless, always even-tempered and low-voiced. She had seen other such women in her occasional wanderings into the better part of the city. She knew that they existed ; yet, as a rule, they either passed her by in perfect unconsciousness of her presence, or drew away from her in disgust. Miss Dering's arm had been around her

humpy back ; Miss Dering's fingers had helped her to sew up her rags ; Miss Dering's eyes had looked kindly down into her eyes, and Miss Dering's voice had spoken to her such words as heretofore she had heard only in her dreams.

Miss Dering never knew the devotion which she had kindled in Sheba's empty heart. Alas, that she was never destined to know ! Light-hearted and sunny-tempered herself, she was used to showing her own likings with perfect freedom. She had no conception of the pent-up emotions of a nature like that of Sheba. She never dreamed how the color of Sheba's life was changed by her interest, how the whole atmosphere of Sheba's day was cleared by a dozen merry words of greeting, by the resting of her hand on the thin shoulders. Sheba's love was dog-like in its singleness, dog-like, too, in its being utterly dumb.

Left to herself, the girl beautified the grimy routine of her life by telling herself wonderful dialogues between herself and Miss Dering. In these talks of her fancy, Miss Dering con-

versed in a jargon of sentimentality, and with a lavishness of caressing phrase which was as foreign to her personality as was the vernacular in which she was supposed to clothe her language. In return, Sheba loosed her own tongue, and in imagination poured out all the promptings of her loyal, starving, adoring little nature.

Next to Miss Dering, Sheba worshipped Adam Dombowski. There was absolutely no glamor about Adam, however. Not even Sheba could become sentimental over the high-handed youngster, who ordered her about and knocked down her foes, with perfect impartiality. Perhaps it was on this account that Adam knew the girl far better than did Miss Dering, that it was to him she talked freely of her childish joys and woes, and of her craving for a love which should be hers alone. Sheba's heaven should consist of one person, whose happiness could be made or marred by the quality of Sheba's smile. She was not selfish. It was only that as yet her life had not meant much to any other living being, and, child though she

was, she fully realized the fact and sincerely mourned over it.

"All de udders has deir kiddies, an' I haint got nobody," she said to Adam, on her way home from the playground, one August afternoon.

"Yer got me."

"Yer 's too big, Adam. It mus' be somebody littler'n you, somebody I kin hang on ter an' cuddle."

"Wot 's de matter with Sol, den?"

"Sol!" Sheba's accent was hopeless. "He don' care nothin' about me, ner wan' me roun'. I—I—I kissed him onct, Adam. I hadn' ought ter; but he wuz so cunnin' I couldn' help it."

"Well, wot of it?"

"Nothin', only I sha'n' never do it ag'in."

"W'y not?"

Sheba hesitated.

"He slapped me," she confessed at last. "T ain't no uset, Adam. He don' wan' me roun' in de way."

But Adam was optimistic.

"Wot about de grown-ups?" he asked, as he pattered along at her side.

"Who?"

"Yer mudder?"

"She don' care 'bout anythin' but Sol."

Adam stole a glance at Sheba's face. He had seen her before in her black moods; but never in one so inky as this, and he suspected some fresh trouble with the Prophets. He had been prevented from going to the playground, that afternoon, until the hour for sewing was ended, and he knew that in his absence Sheba's path was not likely to be strewn with roses. Even Miss Dering often missed some of the by-play, or was at a loss to interpret its full meaning. Under such conditions, it needed the visible presence of Adam's strong arm to quell the riotous trio of Prophets.

"Wot about Miss Derin', den?" he suggested.

"Nothin'." Sheba's tone suddenly lost its plaintive key and became sullen.

Adam faced her in surprise.

"Wot 's de matter wid Miss Derin'?" he demanded.

"Nothin'; only I don' like Miss Derin'."

Adam's fists clinched themselves, then dropped open again. For a minute, he glared at Sheba angrily; evidently it was a question whether he contented himself with the mere glaring. His right fist doubled again; but he stuck it, doubled up as it was, down into his pocket to have it out of temptation's way.

"Miss Derin' don' wan' me ter be alwuz scrappin'," he said tersely; "but I kin tell yer one thing, Sheba Antz: yer never in yer life wuz nearer a good lickin' dan yer is now."

"Lick ahead," Sheba returned morosely. "'T won' be de firs' time I's been licked. Mebby Hosie 'd like ter come an' take a hand in it, fur de sake er gettin' even wid yer."

Adam ignored the outburst.

"An' I kin tell yer one t'ing more," he continued resolutely. "If yer says anudder t'ing, a single t'ing about Miss Derin', I will lick yer, an' lick yer so yer'll know yer's licked, too. Now—wot's de matter wid Miss Derin'?"

"Ain't nothin' de matter wid her. Nothin's

de matter wid nobody, only jus' me," Sheba grumbled. "Wisht I wuz daid. My mudder dropped me an' sp'ilt me; Sol hits me; de udder kids all yell w'en I goes near 'em; Hosie Wikrowski sasses me, an' — Miss Derin' — lets — him." The last words ended in a burst of weeping.

"Miss Derin' don' let Hosie sass yer, Sheba," Adam said soothingly, as he took her hand.

She jerked her hand away.

"Does, too. Yer wuz n' dere, an' yer don' know nothin' about it. I wisht yer 'd lemme 'lone, Adam Dombowski. Yer's alwuz roun' in de way. I don' wan' ter see yer ag'in's long 's I live!" She broke away from him and ran, sobbing, into the dark stairway that led to her home.

Adam whistled reflectively, as he stood staring after her. Then he turned on his heel, found himself face to face with Dannie Mastenbrend and promptly knocked Dannie down. When anything was amiss with Sheba, it was safe to infer that Dannie was at the bottom of the trouble, whatever it might be. To be sure,

Hosie was usually the apparent aggressor ; but Adam long ago had discovered that Dannie's keen brain was generally working behind Hosie's chubby body, that Dannie planned the sins and left Hosie to execute them.

"Miss Derin'! Miss Derin'! Miss Derin'! Oh, Miss Derin'!"

Iteration marked the addresses of the Prophets, and long since Miss Dering had learned that emphasis demanded at least four repetitions of her name. Two meant mere polite salutation.

"What is it, Hosie?" she inquired.

"Adam Dombowski ain't er comin' ter sew, ter-day."

"Why not?"

"His fader's took him out on de wagon."

"On the — wagon?"

"Yep. His fader buys rags." Hosie's tone marked the social gulf between a dealer in second-hand clothing and a dealer in rags.

"I'm sorry. We shall miss him."

"Bet yer!" Hosie replied amicably. "Say, Miss Derin', kin I set in his chair, ter-day?"

"Why don't you sit in your own place, Hosie?"

Hosie blinked up at her fondly.

"'Cause I'd radder set nex' ter my teacher."

And Isabel Dering had laughed and consented.

Later on, she had repented of her kindness. Hosie was apparently a model of decorum and zeal; yet he was the victim of a surprising number of misadventures, and most of the misadventures included Sheba in their ruin. It was, of course, pure accident that led him to put the leg of his chair through a hole in Sheba's skirt and then ask her to hand the thread to Miss Dering. It was also accident that caught the button on his sleeve in her lanky hair. However, when Hosie accidentally knotted the end of his thread with hers and then, in his penitential endeavors to undo the knot, stepped on her bare toes with his stout shoes, Miss Dering began to have her suspicions aroused. She eyed Hosie severely; but Hosie disregarded her glance and went on conversing blandly.

"Wot's we goin' ter do wid de quilt, Miss Derin'?"

"Finish it."

"An' den who gits it?"

"I do," Amos said promptly. "My little sister Ruth had ought ter have it."

"Nah. I got a baby sister, an' she's littler'n Ruth, so't won' take so much sewin' ter cover her," Gideon suggested prudently. "Kin I have it, Miss Derin'?"

"Yer wuz n' in de class till dis year. I sewed, all las' summer, an' Miss Derin' owes me de quilt," Hosie protested, while, under cover of the discussion, he hurriedly sewed a fold of Sheba's skirt to the leg of his trousers.

"Yer got de one, las' year," Dannie objected.

"Den I'll have a pair. Say, Miss Derin', I wan' ter tell yer somethin'."

"Well?"

"Le's give it ter de kids in de hospital. Dey needs it more'n we do."

Miss Dering caught her breath in dismay at the benevolent suggestion. Theoretically, she ought to encourage the idea. Practically, it

was scarcely advisable. She pictured the faces of the hospital authorities, confronted with the smutty, microbe-laden bedquilt whose blocks would probably leak wisps of cotton at every stitch. She was still hesitating what answer to make, when Hosie changed the subject by tipping over backwards in his chair, taking with him a long strip of Sheba's skirt. The next instant, Sheba was upon him, thirsting for vengeance.

"Miss Derin'! Miss Derin'! Miss Derin'! Sheba's hittin' me!"

"He's tore'd my dress," Sheba said shortly, as Miss Dering plucked the foes asunder.

"Did not! I could n' help upsettin' my chair; could I?"

"Yer done it a-purpost."

"Did not! I wuz jus' a-reachin' out fur de scissors. Stop pinchin' me!"

Miss Dering placed herself between the contestants, and there was an interval of quiet.

"Wot's we goin' ter make nex'?" Amos inquired, for the bedquilt was fast approaching completion.

"What do you think of our making some bags out of this?" Miss Dering unrolled some rose-colored cotton and held it up to the admiring gaze of the class.

"Gee! Ain't dat han'some?" Dannie exclaimed. "Miss Derin', it's mos' de same color as my jumper; ain't it?"

"How old are yer, Miss Derin'?" Hosie inquired affably, as he threaded his needle.

"What do you think about it?"

"Mm. 'Bout t'irty-nine, I sh'd say. Bet yer older 'n my mudder, an' she's t'irty."

"Wot 'll we do wid de bags?" Dannie persisted.

"You can each of you make one for yourself. You have been sewing, all summer, on the bedquilt for somebody else; now it is your turn to make something for yourselves," Miss Dering explained, as she provided Gideon with more thread, and bent over to tie a knot in the end.

"Sheba'd better make one ter keep Sol's clean clo'es in," Amos suggested.

"I'm goin' ter give mine ter my mudder," Hosie said virtuously.

"Wot 'll she do wid a pink bag?" Amos demanded.

"Keep her terbaccer in it. Say, Miss Derin'!"

"Well?"

Miss Dering spoke absently, while she looked at her watch. There were days when the sewing hour appeared to be endless. This was one of them, and she was surprised to find how much she missed Adam's efficient support.

"Miss Derin'!"

"What is it, Hosie?"

"Please sharpen my needle," interposed Gideon Golwicz.

"Miss Derin'!"

"What do you want, Hosie?"

Her question was doomed to be left unanswered. Just at that minute, Sheba sprang forward with her arm raised. The next minute, Hosie was sprawling on the floor.

"Sheba!" Miss Dering's tone was stern.

"He wuz makin' faces at me," Sheba returned hotly.

"I wuz n' no such t'ing," Hosie protested

from the spot where he still lay with his ragged toes pointed skyward.

"Wuz, too!"

"Wuz not! I wuz jus' a-whisperin' ter myself, w'ile I waited fur Miss Derin' ter give me 'nudder piece er cloth. Yer need n' be so techy, even if yer have got a humpy back."

There followed an exciting interval when Hosie, an unwilling victim, stood on his head, while two furious hands shook him by the feet. Then Miss Dering interposed.

"Sheba, we can't let you be in the class any more, to-day. You must go out into the playground, and stay there."

And Sheba went. She made no effort to find out what punishment befell Hosie, or whether he was punished at all. It was enough for her that Miss Dering had failed to see at a glance the real justice of the case, that, for the first time, Miss Dering's voice had spoken to her in any accents but those of perfect kindness.

On the way home, she had been joined by Adam, and he too had not paused to inquire

into the truth of the matter. Adam and Miss Dering, Hosie and Sollie, all were alike, all were banded together to torment her, and she stood against them all, humpy and unloved and alone. She toiled wearily up the stairs, and hid herself in a dark corner of the hall, to tire herself out with useless, bitter tears.

VIII.

THE PRICE OF A GREETING.

"SHEBA!"

"Huh?"

"Why have n't you been to the playground, this week?"

"Did n' wan' ter." Sheba's tone was uncompromising, yet she dared not trust herself to look up into the eyes above her.

"Why not?"

"'Cause I did n'. Dat's w'y."

"But I thought you enjoyed it."

Sheba poked a chip this way and that, using her bare great toe with a dexterity unknown to children who spend their lives well shod. Then she gave one furtive glance upward, met Miss Dering's eyes, and dropped her own eyes hurriedly. Miss Dering broke the pause.

"And I miss you," she added quietly.

The girl's face lighted.

"Do yer?" she questioned eagerly. "Do yer, honest an' true, Miss Derin'?" Then a shade came over the light, covering, but not extinguishing it. "But you chased me out," she added slowly.

"Only for that one day, Sheba. I could n't have any fighting in my class."

"But you did n' chase Hosie out."

"Because you 'd have fought with him again, as soon as he was outside."

"He 'd ought ter be fought," Sheba muttered. But Miss Dering shook her head.

"It would n't do any good, Sheba. Fighting never cures things."

"It would cure his sass, I bet."

"No; it would only make him angry and a little bit afraid, and then he would be ten times worse. Fighting does n't cure your temper; does it?"

"I d' know." The chip again absorbed Sheba's attention.

Miss Dering laughed.

"I do know, though. If I had fought you for fighting Hosie, you would have kept on

fighting, perhaps all night long. Instead, I sent you out, where you could n't do anybody any harm."

"Yes; but wot d'yer do to Hosie?"

"That is something I have n't any right to talk over with you, Sheba."

"W'y not? Hosie sassed me, an', if I don' lick him, yer 've got ter, or else Adam has." Sheba's tone was distrustful.

"I did n't tell Hosie that I was going to send you out into the playground; I am not going to tell you what I said to Hosie. He won't make you any more trouble, though. I think I can promise you that."

"Yer must er licked him awful, den." Sheba glanced up in sudden admiration.

"Never mind about that. Are you coming back to the playground, to-morrow? It is sewing day, you know, and we are going to begin the bags."

"Wot 's de good er comin'?"

"Ever so much good. Because I want you."

"No; yer don'. If yer did, yer would n' chase me out."

Isabel Dering bent down to brush the dark hair away from the sombre little face.

"I did n't chase out the Sheba I know best and care for. I drove away a cross little girl who had taken her place."

"I bet yer 'd be cross, if Hosie sass'd yer."

"Very likely; but that's no excuse for you."

Sheba wrinkled her brows in perplexity over Miss Dering's answer. Then she returned to the charge.

"If I can' fight when he sasses, wot can I do?"

"Try to laugh and act as if you did n't care. That is the surest way to stop his teasing."

"But I do care, an' so would you. I wan' ter be let alone, an' I mean ter be."

Miss Dering waived that question.

"And the sewing?" she asked. "Will you be there, to-morrow?"

"Wot 's the uset?"

"What 's the use of the playgrounds?"

"D' know. I can play at home."

"But there's something besides the play, Sheba. You could play all alone; but we go

to the playgrounds to learn to help each other along."

"Nobody never helped me."

"Nobody?"

"No. My mudder sp'ilt me; an' everybody's sassed me fur it ever since."

"Everybody, Sheba?"

The girl's eyes met hers honestly.

"Everybody but jus' you. You alwuz treated me fair, but nobody elst has."

"And Adam?" Miss Dering questioned.

"Ye—es. Him an' Toni's licked a lot er fellers fur me; but nobody elst has."

"I'm sorry, Sheba," Miss Dering said, after a pause. "Still, perhaps you are going to have better times now. And is n't it better than nothing for you to know that I care for you, and want you to be happy and good?"

"Wot d'yer mean by bein' good?" Sheba asked sharply.

"To mind when you are spoken to; not to fight every time something goes wrong; to keep yourself clean and whole, and not be always afraid somebody is trying to hurt you."

"Dey mos'ly is."

"Not so much as you think. There are other things, too, Sheba, but these stand first. Will you try to do them?"

Sheba's face quivered, and her eyes grew dim and dreamy.

"He's clean, an' so're you," she said slowly. "But don' he ever fight?"

"Who?"

"Yer feller, de one dat sings. He's alwuz treated me w'ite."

"Mr. Edmunds?"

"I d' know wot his name is. He sung 'bout not bein' humpy no more, an' he laid fur Sollie w'en he slapped me, las' week. He's awful nice man, Miss Derin', an' I—I—I—" The confession stuck in her throat.

Miss Dering saw no need of prolonging her penitence.

"I know, dear. He told me, and I was sorry to hear about it; but it is n't going to happen any more. Now listen, Sheba. Not for my sake, nor Mr. Edmunds's sake, nor Adam's sake; but just because it is the good thing to

do, are you willing to try not to get so angry, but to be a brave, happy little girl?"

"How can I be brave 'thout'n I fight?"

"By trying not to care when people tease you, and by laughing when things hurt."

Sheba hesitated for a long interval. Then she looked up squarely.

"I will," she said, and there came a sudden break in her voice, a sudden rush of tenderness into her face. "I bet I'd do anythin' in de world fur yer, Miss Derin'. I never knowed wot 't wuz to be hugged roun' my back, till yer done it, an' I love yer better 'n an'thin' elst I knows. If I ever has a kid er my own, I hope 't will be jus' like yer is, an' won' I hang on ter it good an' tight!"

As she spoke, her hands clutched those of Isabel Dering "good and tight." Then abruptly she snatched the soft brown hands to her face, rested one cheek on them caressingly, then the other, and, dropping them, ran swiftly away out of sight.

And Isabel Dering, as she walked away through the strong sunlight, was glad that she

had given up golf, that morning, in order to go down into Rose Street in search of the missing girl. She would have been yet more glad could she have foreseen the future looming ever nearer the child who had rushed away in search of a spot where she could hide her happy tears from the mocking eyes of the Prophets. Joy never kills, yet Sheba's happiness, that cool, bright day, gave her the feeling of sharp physical pain. The joy of living was upon her, the intoxication of feeling that some one cared for her, the hope that, in some mysterious way, the future would atone for all the grim sorrow of the past.

All that day and the next, Sheba was radiant. Until the hour for the sewing class, she lived upon the anticipation of it. After it was over, she lived upon its memory. Isabel Dering, meanwhile, went home to dress for the evening.

"It is an uncanny season for a recital, Jack," she observed at dinner; "but, if you really must sing, I am glad you were inspired to ask me to go with you."

"Let us hope it will be cooler at Sachem's Point than it is here, and that the cars won't be too crowded. How is the Rose Street atmosphere?"

"Quite livable. I was down there, yesterday morning, hunting up Sheba. I had to discipline her, last week, and she has been on her dignity ever since. I had to go in search of her and wave a flag of truce."

"Did she observe it?"

"Yes. I pointed a moral; then we mingled our tears and dried them on the handkerchief of affection. The child is a tragedy, Jack, a grimy, sodden little tragedy, and I can do so little for her."

"More than you know, perhaps. You've a trick of getting the best out of those youngsters, Isabel."

"Even the portly Hosie?"

"Hosie is a beast. But look at Adam."

Isabel Dering's face lighted.

"Dear old Adam! He is my one success."

"You'll find you've a hold on Sheba. Now

if you are ready, we 'd better be sallying forth to the fray."

Half an hour later, on a street corner in the heart of the city, they stood waiting for a car. Around them the twilight was dropping over the elm trees, over Isabel Dering's dainty figure, and over Jack Edmunds, immaculate in his evening clothes. Jack had been out of town for a week, and the cousins were chattering eagerly, doing their best to make up arrears of conversation. Rose Street was as remote from their minds as was Miss Dering's short skirt from the fluffy lawn gown that she held gathered up in her hands.

"Say, yer awful dressed up; ain't yer? Yer looks jus' like a bride in a store winder."

Turning suddenly, she looked down to see Sheba standing before her. The girl's feet and legs were bare, her skirt slit and grimy, but her blouse was pinned together at the throat, and her hair was gathered into a knob at the top of her head. It was not much; but it was her first step up the ladder of evolution. Heedless of her own appearance, she halted before




them, her face glowing with love and admiration. Deliberately her eyes wandered up and down over Jack's snowy linen and shining shoes, over Miss Dering's gown with its frills of creamy lace, and its knots and loops and twists of creamy ribbon. It was only a gown such as Miss Dering wore on any hot summer evening, but to Sheba's eyes it was beautiful and wonderful beyond all words. At last the girl drew a long sigh of perfect content.

"My!" she said slowly. "I never s'posed folks could look so fine. Yer jus' corkin', an' I'm glad I seen yer."

Isabel Dering's kindly, merry, careless answer was still ringing in her ears, as she watched them board their car. Then, turning, she ran along the pavement beside it, and around the corner, determined to watch the bright vision as long as it might be possible. So eager was she, so excited by the meeting and by Miss Dering's cordial manner, that she paid no heed to the whizzing upon the other track, nor to the shouts of the passers-by. Alert and swift, the motorman seized the

brake with one hand, with the other he tried to knock the child aside. He succeeded only in part; but the effort made him miss the open switch in front of him, and, before he could check its speed, his car had gone crashing over to the other track and against the car where Isabel Dering and Jack Edmunds were resuming the talk which Sheba had interrupted.

For the next ten minutes, the confusion was distracting, and it tattered the stillness of the summer twilight. One car was crushed against the curbstone where it swayed insecurely to and fro, threatening to turn on its side at any instant; from under the other, rags of flame were already licking up the surface of the varnished wood. Then the excitement died away as quickly as it had come. By some freak of fortune, two wrecked cars, a ruined white gown and a dozen bruises completed the tale of injuries; and in the buzz of congratulations which followed, no one thought to look for the child who had been the unconscious cause of the accident.



IX.

A ROSE STREET IDYL.

ADAM waggled his head in sympathetic silence. This was the first visit of condolence that he had ever been called upon to make, and, like most of us, he was finding it rather a trying ordeal. It is so much easier to feel sorry for people than it is to give tongue to that sorrow. Adam had been full of eager affection, as he had climbed up the two dark flights of stairs. It had seemed to him the most natural thing in the world that he should go to see Sheba Antz. Once inside the stuffy little room, however, once within range of the piercing dark eyes which stared up at him from the bed-thing in the corner, he would have given worlds upon worlds to have been out in Rose Street once more.

"I'm glad yer done it, Adam," Sheba was

saying, in a voice which all at once had turned shrill and quavering. "'T wuz reel good of yer, an' de doctor says I'd er been killed, if yer had n't er pulled me out."

"'T wan' nothing," Adam protested uneasily, for, like all boys, he hated to receive thanks.

But Sheba paid no heed to the interruption. She had something more to say, and she said it with dreary baldness.

"But I do' know 's 't would er been so much worse ter been killed dan ter had my back busted."

"'T ain't re'ly busted, is it, Sheba?"

"Yep. 'T wuz alwuz humpy, an' now it's sorter cracked, so's 't I can' never git up no more. But yer meant ter be good, Adam, yer alwuz did, an' yer'd er helped it, if yer could."

Both the children were silent for a moment, while their thoughts went backward to the terrible time, three days before, when the trolley car had suddenly whizzed around the corner and struck Sheba down, before she had time to spring to one side. The motorman had done

his best, but Adam had been before him. Like a hero, the boy had played his part in the little tragedy; but he was only ten years old, Sheba was two years older than himself and he had only been able to seize her skirt and jerk her to one side far enough to break the shock of the blow.

That was three days ago. In other surroundings, it would have been weeks before Sheba would have been allowed to see any one. In this crowded tenement, her bed was in the family living-room where, at all hours, her mother received calls from the neighbors, and told over the details of the accident. In fact, Sheba's mother rather gloried in the affair. She felt that it lent a certain distinction to the entire family. For the time being, Sheba's importance quite dethroned Solomon from his reigning position, and Mrs. Antz took some pains to become properly hysterical whenever a fresh caller was announced. To-day, however, the two children were left quite to themselves, and Adam, as he sat staring into the white face of his friend, vaguely regretted the fact.

"I hain't had no chum since Toni Valovick moved out 'n de street," he said abruptly; "an' it's goin' ter be awful lonesome till yer gits better, Sheba."

A strong shaft of sunshine lay across the bed. Sheba raised her hand to her eyes to shield them, and Adam rose and went to the window.

"Dere! Ain't dat better?" he asked, as he pinned a ragged newspaper across the open casement.

The great Yiddish characters of a full-page advertisement cast sprawling shadows across the tumbled bed. Sheba took down her hand which was a little wet here and there.

"How'd yer know wot would do it, Adam?" she inquired.

"W'en de kiddie wuz sick, he useter be awful uneasy, w'en de sun wuz on him, so I useter pin up a pyper. See? Guess I'd better be goin' now," he added, with an attempt at his usual tone. "I'll come ag'in. S'long."

"I wisht yer would. How's Hosie?"

"Sore's de deuce, w'ere I licked him fur not

sayin' he's sorry 'bout yer." And Adam departed, finding even the reeking odors of Rose Street a relief from the glaring heat of the little room, and from the sharp eyes that looked out at him from the bed in the corner.

A week later, he went again. He had watched at the foot of the staircase, until he had seen Sheba's mother sally forth for an airing and a gossip with Mrs. Budesheim in the next block. It was a heavy gray morning, when the sky seemed to crowd down upon Rose Street and force back upon it all the evil which was seeking to escape. Down in the street, every one was irritable. An early-morning shower had left the roadway a mass of sodden mud, and the mud was largely mingled with the unnamable débris from many stalls and push-carts. Up in Sheba's room, the walls were covered with a clammy perspiration, and the blanket huddled around her shoulders was cold to Adam's touch, as he took her hand. Her face was thinner than before, her eyes more piercing; but her manner was alert.

"Miss Derin' an' her feller's been here," she said, without other greeting.

"W'en?"

"Yest'day."

"Wisht I 'd seen her."

"An' him," Sheba corrected jealously. "He sung ter me."

"Wot 'd he sing?"

"Lots er t'ings, funny ones, an' den I arst him ter sing de one he sung at de Mission. Bet yer, 't wuz good."

"Wot 'd Miss Derin' say?"

"She wuz jus' lovely. She had n' only jus' heard as my back wuz busted, an' she said she's goin' ter miss me in de sewin'; but she'll sen' me down my bag. She brung me some fruit. Look it!" Sheba pointed to a little basket heaped high with grapes and peaches.

"Gee!" Adam's tone was admiring. "Dat ain't wot we gits down in Rose Street."

"Take some, if yer wan' ter."

"Nah, I do' wan' none. I hates peaches." Adam fibbed sturdily, although he was forced



to turn his eyes away from the rosy-cheeked temptation. "Wot elst 'd she say?"

"Oh, all sorts er t'ings. An' she brung her dorg."

"Wot sort er dorg?"

"Little, wid long gray hair an' a yaller ribbon, an' he sot on her lap an' licked her, all de time she's here. He wuz awful pretty. I wisht I had such a dorg as dat."

"Fur wot?"

"Ter play wid, an' have him lick me. 'T would be mos' as good as havin' a kid dat b'longed ter me. He'd be mine, all mine, an' I shouldn' be so lonesome den."

Adam winced at her tone.

"Did he lick you any?"

"Nah. He jus' sot in her lap an' looked at her all de time, only onct w'en he looked at her feller. I don' blame him any. I'd look at her, if I's in his place. But, if he wuz mine, he'd lick me."


"Look it! Maybe she'll come ag'in."

"She said so."

"An' bring de dorg?"

"She never said 'bout dat. But, Adam, jus' t'ink er havin' such a dorg, all my own! He'd lay on de bed wid me, an' lick me, an' I could hang on ter him an' cuddle him, jus' like he wuz a kid. Yer never see no such dorg, Adam. W'y, his hair wuz as long 's dat." She measured generously with her thin hands.

Miss Dering came again, and so did Adam. He found Sheba still talking about the dog. He wondered a little jealously why the dog seemed to be eclipsing Miss Dering in Sheba's affection. In his hearty boyish strength, he could not know that in the dog's brown eyes Sheba had read the possibility of a love, unswerving, uncriticising, which not even Miss Dering had been able to give her. Her worship of Miss Dering was undiminished; but she realized that it was only worship. Miss Dering's world was not her own. In the playground, and in Rose Street, Sheba had never felt the remoteness; the sense of it had come upon her, the night of her accident, even while she had been listening to Miss Dering's friendly, caressing words. Their worlds were hope-



lessly, endlessly apart, and nothing could bridge the gulf between them. Adam's world was all her own, and Sheba turned to him unreservedly. The dog could have no world. He belonged wherever chance might set him down.

"Onct she brung him, an' twict she did n'. I wisht she'd bring him alwuz. Las' time, I put my hand out ter him, an' he licked it, an' his tongue wuz soft as silk. She says his name is Grands'n; but she calls him Micky."

"I sh'd think she could get a better name 'n dat," Adam said scornfully. "Say, Sheba, wot if she'd sen' de dorg down ter see yer, some day?"

"Oh, I wisht she would! Maybe, if she wa'n' here, he'd lay down wid me, an' let me cuddle him."

With apparent carelessness, Adam led the talk into other channels. Nevertheless, he had taken a great resolution. He had watched Sheba's face closely, these last days, and he had seen there the same color that the baby's face had worn, the summer it died; he had also


seen the pink flush which came into Sheba's cheeks whenever she talked of the dog. Adam was loyal to his friends, and his loyalty was not alone that of impulse.

Miss Dering lived far away from Rose Street, up on the avenue where the houses were set in smooth green lawns, where fire-escapes were not, and where the verandas were broad and shady. With her lived Sir Charles Grandison, daintiest of Yorkshire terriers, whose finical habits had led Jack Edmunds to dub him the Milksop. The name, shortened to Micky, clung to him to the exclusion of the other, and Micky's habits justified the name.

On this particular morning, freshly bathed and beribboned, he sat on his own down pillow on the veranda, listening to Miss Dering, who was reading aloud to her mother.

"Now we are come to our Kingdom,
But my love's eyelids fall —
All that I wrought for, all that I fought for,
Delight her nothing at all."

Micky barked sharply, explosively, and Miss Dering looked up.



"Why, Adam, how do you do? Did you come to see me?"

"Yes 'm." Adam was seized with sudden shyness, as he met Micky's critical gaze.

"Sit down; won't you? I'm glad to see you, dear. Mother, this is Adam Dombowski, the right-hand man of my sewing class. Sit here, Adam." She moved a chair invitingly.

"I ain't er goin' ter stay. Is dat de dorg?"

"Yes, that is my dog. Where did you ever hear about him?"

"Sheba tol' me. She t'ought he wuz jus' great." Adam hesitated, while he drove his fists hard down into his pockets. Then he blurted out the errand which had brought him. "Say, Miss Derin' dear, look it! Sheba says dat dorg is all right, an' she wants him ter come ter lick her jus' onct. She tol' me if only she had a dorg like dat, she would n' min' bein' humpy an' busted. I do' wan' him. He's all hair, an' he looks as if a mush rat could lick him easy; but she —" Adam came to a halt. Restlessly he drew his sleeve across his dingy face; then he went on, a bit breathlessly, "Say,

kin I take yer dorg fur a while? I'll bring him back by dinner time. She wan's him ter lay down beside her, jus' fur a while, so 's 't she kin talk ter him an' act's if he wuz hern. He won' say nothin' ter her, yer know, w'en you's dere, an' so I t'ought she'd like it if I's ter borry him. She did n' say so; I knowed 't wuz wot she's wishin', though. Yer see, if yer back's busted an' yer has to stay alone, yer wan's somethin' 'r udder dat well folks would n' t'ink wuz wuth havin'. If Sheba wuz well, she would n' have no uset fur dat Micky dorg er yourn."

Micky winced at the scornful wave of the boy's thumb. He was not accustomed to hearing allusion made to himself in any such terms as that, and it injured his feelings.

"Sick folks wan's queer t'ings, yer know," Adam went on more bravely, as he looked up into Miss Dering's kindly eyes; "an' if yer'd seen her get all red in de face, w'en she 's talkin' about it, I bet yer'd let him go."


Adam had made his plea well. Miss Dering gave one reluctant glance at her dainty pet,

cast one reluctant thought towards the condition in which he probably would return. Then she snapped the lead on his collar and watched him as he went away, an unwilling and protesting victim, in the arms of his ragged guardian. She waited until she had seen them board a street car. She had provided money for the fares, not solely on Adam's account, but because Micky was quite unused to long walks in the heat. Then, when the car had vanished around the corner, she put on her hat and went away to the nearest apothecary for an extra cake of tar soap.

"I've brung him, Sheba!" Adam's voice thrilled with eagerness, as he pushed open the door.

At the other side of the room, Mrs. Antz was frying onions, and Micky choked audibly, as the aroma greeted him.

"Brung wot, Adam?" Sheba's voice was weaker, to-day, and querulous withal. Her back hurt her; the room was like an oven, and the strangling odor of the onions thickened the air almost to a paste.



"Dis feller." Adam cast Micky, violet bow and all, down upon the ragged coverlet.


"Oh, Adam, w'ere 'd yer git him? Did Miss Derin' send him?"

"I borried him," Adam said briefly, as he dropped into a chair by the bedside, and prepared to enjoy the success of his experiment.

"Oh, yer little dear! Oh, yer sweet little doggie! Come here an' lick me," Sheba crooned, as she stretched out her hands to the dog. Her face was pink now, pinker than Adam ever remembered having seen it before, and her voice took on an accent of infinite love and tenderness. "Come, dearie," she begged; "come here an' lay down an' lick me. Come an' lick Sheba, darlin', fur her back's all humpy an' busted."

But Micky cast a protesting glance towards the stove, sneezed sharply, and then withdrew to the foot of the bed, where he sat, a shivering, abject bundle of silky gray hair and shimmering violet ribbon.

Again and again Sheba tried to call him to her; again and again Adam lifted him bodily



and set him down close to Sheba's side. Micky was both obdurate and snobbish. He only huddled himself more closely against the cracked footboard, and shivered more and more abjectly. At last, the pink color had all faded from Sheba's cheeks. Covering her face with her thin hands, she burst out sobbing.

"'Tain't no uset, Adam," she wailed. "He's jus' like all de res'; he don' like me, an' he won' lick me, ner say nothin' ter me. He might er give me jus one little lap; but he won' even do dat. Yer'd better take him back ter Miss Derin'; but, oh, if he'd only jus' lay down an' stay wid me, one little minute, so's 't I could play he wuz mine!"

"'Twan' no sort er uset," Adam reported dejectedly to Miss Dering, an hour later, as he returned a soiled, onion-flavored, rapturous Micky to her arms. "He had n' got no uset fur her, an' he showed dat he had n'. I'm much 'bliged ter yer fur lettin' me borry him, Miss Derin' dear; but borried dorgs ain't like havin' one er yer own. Dis one is too cranky fur Sheba, anyhow. He's 'bout's bad as Sol. He

t'inks he's de whole blasted show, an' he cares more fur his clo'es dan he does ter be liked. Sheba's got ter have somethin' dat ain't so awful fine."

Enthroned upon the knee of his mistress, Micky licked her distractedly. In his joy, he even directed a vaguely condescending caress at the air between himself and Adam's face. Adam, meanwhile, had dropped down on the step at Miss Dering's feet, where he sat with his chin in his hands, staring moodily out across the lawn.

"It's blame queer about Sheba," he observed thoughtfully at length. "She ain't no chum er mine. She's humpy, an' a girl, an' 't wuz only dat yer tol' me ter, dat I'd er spoke to her, anyhow. I s'pose I's licked de fellers fur sassin' her, till she seems sort er mine, yer know; an' now she's busted her back, I miss seein' her roun'. Dere don' seem no sense in scrappin' any more, now I hain't got Sheba to scrap fur. 'T ain't dat I cares fur her; it's only —" He rose abruptly. "G'by, Miss Derin' dear. Yer'll be down ter sewin', ter-morrer?" And he made a hurried departure.

X.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA ENTERS THE KINGDOM.

THE rose-colored bags were nearing completion. So also was August nearing completion, and, with the waning of August, there waned one gray little human life.

It was later than usual, one day, when Miss Dering came to her sewing class. She found the Prophets, hatted and smutty-handed, prancing impatiently in their chairs.

"Dere she is!"

"Miss Derin'! Miss Derin'! Come an' set by me!"

"No; me, ter-day!"

"W'ere yer been? Yer awful late."

"We t'ought yer was n' comin'. Gideon said he seen yer down in front er Mission."

"Wot wuz yer doin' dere, Miss Derin'?"

"Say, wot makes yer so late?"

The other classes paused with suspended needles to watch the clamorous Prophets. Isabel Dering laughed a little, as she confiscated the hats and ordered the boys to go to wash their hands. Then her face grew grave again, while she unpacked the box which held the half-finished bags, rosy no more, and the sticky needles and thread. Amos was the first to reappear from his ablutions. Treating the floor like a frozen lake, he took a short run, slid up to Miss Dering's side, and tumbled over his chair.

"Yer awful late, Miss Derin'," he observed, as he picked himself up.

She glanced at her watch.

"Ten minutes, boys. I am sorry."

"Miss Derin'!"

"But I have been to see Sheba."

"Miss Derin'!"

"Poor little Sheba is very ill."

"Miss Derin'!"

"What is it, Hosie?"

"How many karats is yer watch?"

"Sixteen, I believe," she answered absently, her mind still upon Sheba.

"Hh! My sister 's got one dat 's eighteen, an' her chain 's bigger 'n yer little finger, an' it goes twict roun' her neck."

"Look it," Dannie demanded. "I want a piece er t'read. No; gimme long piece. I won' tangle it up, now honest."

"Miss Derin'," Amos inquired; "yer know de night Sheba wuz busted? Well, dey says yer feller an' yer wuz in de cars dat got smashed tergedder."

"So we were."

"Did yer see Sheba git busted?" Hosie piped excitedly.

Miss Dering shivered a little.

"Yer cold?" Gideon inquired courteously.

"No, dear. I was only thinking about Sheba."

"An' did yer feller save yer?" Amos asked, pursuing his own train of thought, regardless of all interruptions.

"N-no. I'm not sure that anybody saved me."

"How 'd yer git out 'n de car, den?"

"We — we walked out," Miss Dering confessed tamely.

"Gee! An' I heard 'em sayin' dat he took yer in his arms an' said, 'We will die tergedder' — Wot's yer firs' name, Miss Derin'?"

"Isabel."

"Dat's it. 'We will die tergedder, Isabel.' Dat's wot he said, an' den he jumped."

"Miss Derin'!"

"Yes, Hosie."

"Gimme nudder piece er cloth."

"Please."

"Please. I furgot. Say, look it! If Sheba had n' er been busted, an' yer had, yer bet we'd er been sorry."

"You are sorry for Sheba now; are n't you, Hosie?"

"Yep. But she could n' er gi'n us de pink bags. Even if we'd got 'em done, she would n't er knowed how ter put de strings in 'em."

"Miss Derin', wot's goin' ter be done wid de bedquilt?"

"Say, Miss Derin', wot d' yer s'pose I'm er goin' ter do wid my bag?"

"I can't imagine, Gideon."

"I'm goin' ter carry my liberry books in it, an' den I won' spill out any leaves on de way home."

"Miss Derin', wot's goin' ter become er de bedquilt?" Amos reiterated.

"What do you boys want to do with it?"

"I d' know."

"Le's have a look at it," Gideon demanded.

Miss Dering rose and went to the closet where their treasure lay hid. Returning, she spread the quilt on the floor at their feet, and the boys eyed it with manifest pride. Notwithstanding the fact that Miss Dering had put it together and lined it, it stood to them as their very own work, and they regarded it fondly as it lay there, thick and puffy and bordered with a gay pink band. It was only a few feet of patchwork, held with jagged, uneven stitches that gaped here, piled up there, and were smutty everywhere; and yet, it was their very own work. Therefore it was good.

And, strange to say, Isabel Dering felt nearly as much pride in it as they did.

"Ain't it pretty, Miss Derin'?" Amos demanded.

"Yes, very." Her tone was a little absent.

"Wot yer t'inkin' 'bout?" Dannie inquired.

She roused herself with an effort.

"I was thinking about Sheba, boys. She looked so thin and ill, and the room was so hot; but she said she was cold, and she was rolled up in an old blanket, with a man's coat over her feet. She says she can't get her feet to feel warm."

"Dat's 'cause her back's off its trolley, w'ere it's busted in two," Hosie suggested practically.

There was a silence, while the pink bags absorbed the whole attention of the boys. Suddenly Amos looked up.

"Please sharpen my needle," he demanded.

"Look it, Miss Derin', le's give dat quilt ter Sheba."

Miss Dering smiled contentedly; but she

held her peace. The gift, if gift it were to be, should come from the boys alone.

"Sheba Antz! She don't wan' it," Hosie protested.

"Does, too! Her feet's cold, Miss Derin' says. B'sides, 't won' be like lettin' it go out 'n de class," Amos said thriftily.

"Class, er no class, I votes fur Sheba," Dannie proclaimed.

Hosie giggled.

"'T ain't big enough ter cover her hump," he suggested.

The next minute, he lay on the floor, with Dannie sitting on his stomach. For the once, Miss Dering failed to rebuke the Prophets for fighting.

"You — jus' — shut — up!" Dannie punctuated his words with a *staccato* movement of his fists. "It's a blame sneak dat'll sass a girl w'en she's busted. W'en Sheba kin fight fur herself, yer kin say wot yer wan's ter; but dat ain't now, nur nebber will be ag'in. If yer sasses Sheba, I'll lick yer. Wot's more, Sheba gits de quilt."

"Does anybody know where Adam is?" Miss Dering asked, when quiet was restored. "He has n't been here for a week, and I miss him."

Nobody had seen Adam, it seemed; not even Sheba. For the past two weeks, she had missed his calls acutely. Without them, the time had dragged heavily. He had been accustomed to talk but little; still, it had been consoling to have him there. He had brought with him a flavor of the old free life when she too had run riot in Rose Street; he had brought her the comforting assurance that he had missed her enough to have made him willing to climb the dark stairs and sit for half an hour in the hideous little room. Her invalidism had become an old story to the street, and the neighbors no longer dropped in to hear the tale. Like all other classics, she was relegated to a top shelf; and her mother and Sol betook themselves off in search of fresh interests. Under these conditions, she felt Adam's defection keenly.

"W'y do n't yer come ter see me no more?" she asked flatly, one day.

"I'm here now ; ain't I?" he asked with apparant nonchalance.

"Yes ; but yer ain't been, for more'n a week."

Adam smiled mysteriously.

"I'm — busy, Sheba."

"Wot doin'?"

"Oh, somethin'." His mystery deepened.

"Yer need n' tell, if yer don' wan' ter," she said resentfully ; "only, if yer back's busted, I guess yer'd like to hear 'bout t'ings, an' I don' have nobody ter talk ter, all day long."

"Maybe I kin borry Micky," Adam suggested.

To his astonishment, Sheba covered her face with the blanket and burst into tears.

"An' he would n' have nothin' ter say ter me, Adam, ner lick me ! An' I wanted him ter so bad ! Der ain't nothin' cares fur me !"

Adam rose.

"I got ter go," he said abruptly. "I'm awful sorry, Sheba ; but I got somethin' ter do, an' I — I'm so awful busy."

"Don' go, Adam. I won' cry no more."

"I mus', Sheba. I'll come back."

In all truth, Adam was busy, very busy. For the past two weeks, he had given himself no rest. Morning, noon, and night, he had sold papers as usual. In the intervals, he had run errands, held horses, run more errands, and yet more. It was the last of the dogday season, and, throughout the suffocating days, Adam worked unceasingly, while his meagre hoard of pennies slowly increased. He was unwilling to stop long enough even to visit Sheba. When finally he did mount the many stairs leading to her room, he came away, lashed by a sharp fear which goaded him on to yet swifter effort. The pennies came so slowly; the grayish shadows gathered so fast upon Sheba's thin face. A year before, in watching beside his baby brother, he had learned to know the meaning of those shadows.

From Sheba's room, he went straight to his own, counted his little hoard of pennies, and then, shutting his teeth firmly together, he went away from Rose Street to the avenue where

Miss Dering lived. He found her in the midst of packing her trunks. The playgrounds had closed for the season, the day before, and Miss Dering was making ready to rush off to the mountains in search of fresher air. Jack Edmunds was already there, impatient for her coming.

With a little bundle in her hand, and with Micky tagging at her heels, she came running lightly down the wide, sunny stairway.

"Adam, dear boy, where have you been? I have missed you, all these sewing days. Here is your bag, dear; I finished it for you. Have you been ill?"


"I'm all right; but I can' stop ter talk," he said abruptly. "Much 'bliged fur de bag, an' will yer len' me fifty-seven cents? I'll pay it back, Miss Derin' dear, soon 's I kin earn it. I been workin' fur t'ree weeks, an' I hain't got but forty-t'ree cents. I wan' ter buy somethin' fur Sheba. She's dyin' so fas' dat I dassen' wait no longer, an' it costs a dollar. No; I don' wan' yer ter give it ter me. It's my own

give, er nothin'. I kin pay yer, if yer'll gimme time."

Late that afternoon, he climbed the stairs again, weary, but triumphant. He found Sheba lying quiet under the pink-bordered bedquilt, with her eyes closed and her head turned away from the light. She roused herself at his step.

"Here 's somethin' fur yer, Sheba," he said, with a queer little choke in his voice. "I bought him fur yer, an' he's yourn fur keeps. Dat's wot's been makin' me so busy. Look it!" And he dropped down upon the bed a scrawny, spotty puppy, all legs and ribs and lopping, uncut ears.

There was an expectant silence. The puppy stared at Sheba; Sheba stared at the puppy, and Adam stared at them both, with his small heart pounding against his breast. Then the puppy fulfilled his mission. No thoroughbred Yorkshire was he, no gentleman, yet no snob. For a minute longer, he looked at the white face on the pillow, looked anxiously, searchingly, as if awaiting a word of invitation.



Then he wagged his lanky tail, crawled across the pink-bordered bedquilt, nestled down at Sheba's side and licked her face with a friendly, deprecating little tongue. The next minute, Sheba's arms closed around him.

"Oh, Adam!" she said, and again, "Oh, Adam!" Then, after a long interval, "I got somebody now dat's all mine, an' 't won' be so bad ter have my back busted. S'long's he stays wid me, I sha'n' mind."

Three weeks later, Sheba's mother had regained all her old prominence in Rose Street circles. A bit of rusty crape hung from the door, and the rabbi had been there twice during the past twenty-four hours. Solomon had blazed forth in all his glory, and the little room was decked as if for a masquerade. Out on the stairs in the dark sat the only real mourners. There were two of them, Adam Dombowski and the nameless, mongrel puppy.

THE END.



